DOWNY WING & SHARP EARS

BY CAROL CASSIDY COLE

Carol Cassidy Cole Books

Velvet Paws and Shiny Eyes, Downy Wings and Sharp Ears, Little Big Ears and the Princess, tell of the adventurings of little Eric and Princess Rosalie with their feathered and furry friends. Among these friends, tiny listeners will be particularly delighted with Little Big Ears (who is a rabbit) Mr. and Mrs. Downy Woodpecker, Willy Weasel, Mr. Mink, Mr. Skunk, Wabasso, Old Kit Fox, Ka-Ka the Crow and Cheku the Chipmunk. These magic stories are dear to the hearts of little people.

Lois R. Peck

Further stories of Little Wild Friends, told by Nat, the Collie and Yota, the Goose.

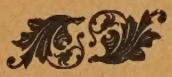
DOWNY WING AND SHARP EARS

Adventures of a little Boy among little wild friends in Natures Wonderland

BY

CAROL CASSIDY COLE

Author of "Velvet Paws and Shiny Eyes"



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
1	The Joyful Reunion	1
II	Piney and Bushtail	5
III	Cottontail Rabbit's Narrow Escape	10
IV	Wise Old Thumper	14
V	The Story of Fleetfoot	18
VI	The Dance of the Cranes	23
VII	Bushtail Plays Possum	27
VIII	The Eagle who could not be a Goose	32
IX	The Woodpeckers go House Hunting	37
X	The Crows and the Silver Money	41
XI	Thumper and Tufty Escape the Trap	46
XII	How the Birds Came to Canada	50
XIII	The Island of the Gulls	55
XIV	Otto, the Beaver	58
XV	The Cottontails and the Alligator	61
XVI	Growler, the Big Bear	66
XVII	Sniffer and the Grizzly	71
XVIII	Mr. Racoon Goes Frog Hunting	76
XIX	Piney Squirrel	81
XX	The Flying Squirrel	86
XXI	Mr. Fox Meets Mr. Woodchuck	90
XXII	The Adventure of Chipper	95
XXIII	Chipper's Quarrel with Jimmie Skunk	100
XXIV	Mr. and Mrs. Downy Woodpecker	104
XXV	The Call	109

Downy Wing and Sharp Ears

CHAPTER I

The Joyful Reunion.

IT was the most beautiful weather outside! Eric Oldson, that little boy who had spent the previous summer journeying with the wild geese, could hardly contain himself. He wanted to shout with joy and happiness at the coming of Spring.

The door of his mother's bright, sunshiny kitchen stood open, and he heard voices outside. It was his father and a neighbor.

"I had better luck this year, Mr. Oldson," the neighbour was saying.

"How is that?" asked the voice of his father.

"Why, I caught the goose this time. The flock alighted on the marsh just as they did last year. I had my net ready, and lowered it quickly—but I'm afraid it's an old one, and I wanted a young gander," he added in disappointed tones.

Eric's heart beat fast. Without waiting to hear another word, he slipped out and made his way to the road. He ran quickly toward the adjoining farm. Nat, the beautiful big collie, bounded joyfully beside him.

They passed through the cow yard, where the cattle lowed their approval of the spring weather, and the hen yard, where the hens pattered about contentedly in the mud, until they came to the goose-pen. Over

in the far corner waddled a flock of geese. They were fat, clumsy creatures, and they seemed to have nothing better to do than to paddle up and down the place in the most aimless fashion.

But there was one among them who did not look like the others. Her feathers were of a cold, cold grey, and made one think of ice-bergs and Arctic regions. Her legs were coarse, her feet worn, and her neck, which was long and bony, gave the impression of great age. Only her eyes were undimmed; they alone shone with a youthful fire. And when she moved among the others, then one was sure she was of a different breed. The fat lumbering creatures who were her companions, waddled aimlessly from side to side. But the grey one did not walk. She half ran, and incessantly she raised herself on her ragged looking feet, and flapped her great wings, but not an inch could she raise herself from the ground. Farmer Green had seen to that, for he had trimmed the poor Goosie's wings so closely that there was not the slightest chance of escape.

Eric stood silently watching the flock. In a moment his eye fell upon the Grey Goose. He drew his breath sharply. Could it be possible?

Now, it may seem strange to you, but it is true nevertheless, that ever since Eric's wonderful journey with the geese that Summer, he had been able to understand the language of all the wild creatures. Now he came close to the goose.

"Can it be you, Yota?" he asked softly.

The Gray Goose stood still, with neck stiffened, as if listening.

"Yota," repeated the boy, "don't you know me?"

But now the Grey Goose came rushing toward him.

First she took him by the sleeve and shook him, then she stroked him gently with her bill, then she shook him again—she was so glad to see him. And Eric could not help seizing the old goose and kissing her on both cheeks.

Yota looked rather suspiciously at Nat, but considering it beneath her dignity to display alarm at such an insignificant creature as a tame dog, she made no sign that she had seen him. And Nat showed the disdain he felt for a wild goose by sitting down behind his master and gazing fixedly into the distance in his most aloof manner.

Then the questions rose in Eric's mind so fast that he could hardly put them into words. Where had the

Eric could not help Kissing the old Goose.

flock passed the winter? How was Tawny Owl? Had Mr. Fox been on their trail? Or Willy Weasel? Had the little lost bear ever run away again? How was Mr. Coon? And Wabasso and all the other hares—

were they still holding their midnight frolics in the moonlight? Had the geese met any new friends since he had left them?

All of these questions fell from the little boy's lips so fast that Yota could not help laughing, but she told him all he wanted to know about his old friends, and then, settling herself into a little grey ball close beside him, she began these fascinating tales about some new ones.

CHAPTER II

Piney and Bushtail.

IT was a fine morning with just a tinge of frost in the air, Piney and Bushtail, two young squirrels, sat upon an old hollow log and barked away in conversation with one another.

"Let me think," said Piney, "where did I put that last hazel nut I found yesterday? It certainly was a beauty and I should be sorry to lose it."

"That's the trouble with you, Piney," said Bushtail, "you're always so eager to find every nut that falls, that you don't know half the time where you hide them. Now you know that's very wasteful," and Bushtail frisked down to the ground and looked reprovingly at the other squirrel as he hunted about in the leaves for the lost treasure.

"Oh, I don't know about that," answered Piney. "Every nut that I hide and forget, grows into a tree some day, so you see I am really doing somebody a good turn. I remember where I put that nut!" he exclaimed suddenly and darted off to a nearby maple he scratched vigorously around the roots. In a moment he returned triumphantly with a very sandy hazel nut in his sharp little teeth.

"There," he exclaimed, "Isn't that a beauty? That makes two dozen hazel nuts."

"That's entirely too many, Piney," interrupted Bushtail. "Can't you tell by your coat that we are going to have a very mild winter? You'll not need half your store. Besides being wasteful, Piney," he went on,

"you're very careless. Last evening when I went by you were sleeping in your den with your tail in plain sight. It looked to me as if you were inviting Sharpclaws, the owl, or Redtail Hawk to come along and eat you!"

"If you had looked a little closer, Bushtail, you would have seen that my tail was right in the midst of a spider web, and no one could approach very closely without those telephone lines giving me the signal."

"Just the same, danger is pretty close when it comes that near," said Bushtail wisely.

"Hm," answered Piney, "I haven't seen an owl or a hawk around for a week. I think they must have gone south. That reminds me I must go over to Cedar Row this morning. I need some strips of bark from the cedar trees to use in my house." And thus from one thing to another the two squirrels chattered away to one another.

Over in Cedar Row, Sharpclaws the owl, sat in the doorway of his house and blinked dizzily as the bright rays of the rising sun reached his retreat. Something had awakened him from his sleep and he was not in a very good humor. And what was more he felt the gnawing of an awful hunger. It had been several days since he had enjoyed a real feast, having been obliged the last day or two to be satisfied with a few miserable field mice. As he poked his head out of his house he was greeted by a familiar sound.

"Who, who, are you?" called a voice.

"Why, if there isn't Hooter," exclaimed Sharpclaws. "I just wonder if by any chance he knows where one could get a meal." Soon the two birds were in deep conversation. It appeared that Hooter was as hungry as his companion. Each declared that the hunting

had been very poor lately. Sharpclaws told how he had stalked a pair of partridges for a week, and how when he had tracked them to a leafy covert, and was waiting for it to grow dark when his eyesight would be better, old Redtail Hawk had swooped down and taken them from under his very nose.

Hooter had been equally unfortunate, and had only missed a fine woodpecker supper that very day. He became so angry in reciting his misfortunes to the

The two Owls drew back in the hole and held themselves perfectly still.

other owl that he flapped his great wings noisily and clapped his beak together like a parrot.

"Hist!" whispered Sharpclaws, "what was that?" The two owls drew back in the hole and held themselves perfectly still, their eyes narrowed to slits, their feathers depressed.

Through the thicket, from the direction of Blackberry Grove came the two squirrels, Piney and Bushtail. Straight for the row of cedars they turned their steps. Piney intent upon securing the cedar bark for his nest, chattered away noisily to the other.

"Here's a fine one, Bushtail," he said. "The bark is already peeling," and he paused directly under the tree in which were the two owls.

"I wish we hadn't come here, Piney," said Bushtail. "You know this is the favourite haunt of the owls," and he looked nervously about him.

From the hole in the tree above, the eyes of Sharpclaws shone like two round balls of fire. Here at his very door he was at last to find a meal! In his excitement his grip on the tree grew tighter and tighter, until a piece of the rotted bark broke away and fell to the ground.

"Look out!" shrieked Bushtail.

"Run!" screeched Piney.

Flap! and Sharpclaws swept to the ground beneath. But too late! The two squirrels sprang through the thicket to safety, and old Sharpclaws floundered around on the ground nearly blinded by a strong ray of light. The woods were noisy with the danger signals of the squirrels as they scattered away in every direction.

My! what a crackling and sputtering of beaks there

was when the two angry owls found that once more their prey had escaped them.

* * * *

"That surely was an adventure for those two squirrels," said Eric when he had listened breathlessly to Yota's story.

"Yes," said Yota, and that reminds me of the narrow escape that Cottontail Rabbit had one day in the pennyroyal patch, but we'll have to wait till tomorrow for that one. It's getting too late for more stories now."

CHAPTER III

Cottontail Rabbit's Narrow Escape.

IT was a boiling hot day, and Cottontail, the rabbit, who lived in Mulberry Swamp, was feeling nearly suffocated in his heavy coat of fur. He lay on his side and panted, he stretched his parched little nose as far as he could into the bushes in hopes of finding a bit of dew. But everywhere was the same burnt grass giving forth heat like a furnace.

"Oh! if I only had a nip of pennyroyal," said Cottontail. "I'm sure I wouldn't mind this terrible heat half so much. But the only pennyroyal patch to be found was, as he well knew, over at Hazeltop Grove fully a mile away.

Giving a long sigh, Cottontail crept farther into the grasses and tried to forget his discomfort in a little snooze. But the more he tried to forget about that pennyroyal patch the wider awake he became, until at last it seemed as if he could actually smell it.

"Perhaps it's not so far to the grove after all," he said, jumping to his feet. "Maybe if I keep close to the thicket there will be shade." Having thus persuaded himself, he started at once.

He hopped leisurely along, stopping to nibble a root here and there, or to listen to the warning hoot of an owl. Soon he came upon a small willow tree from which the bark had been stripped in places. Going up close he was able to make out an inscription. It was in rabbit shorthand, and of course, no foxes, wood-

From the underbrush burst a pack of hounds.

chucks, nor any others but the rabbit tribe were able to make it out. The sign read:

"This way to Hazeltop Grove. Turn at the old stump, and thirty jumps will take you to the Pennyroyal Patch."

"Fine!" said Cottontail when he had finished reading. "Over there's the stump, and now for the thirty jumps, and I'll have my fill of pennyroyal."

But Cottontail, although so near to his goal, was destined not to reach it so easily. Over in Daisy Meadow, on the other side of Hazeltop Grove, lived a rabbit by the name of Proudfoot. Now Proudfoot,

although white like the other rabbits in the meadow, had one coalblack foot. It was whispered about among the rabbits that he had descended from a stock of tame rabbits, who had escaped from a zoological garden. Now this, in the estimation of the wild rabbits, was about the worst that could be said of him. For, as everyone knows, wild creatures hold all tame ones in the greatest contempt. At any rate, Proudfoot was different from the others not only in looks, but also in disposition. A rabbit is usually one of the most peaceable creatures, and asks nothing more in life than a patch of meadow and a bit of pennyroyal.

But Proudfoot was quarrelsome. He quarreled with every rabbit that came to the grove. He quarreled about the pennyroyal, the carrot patch and the willow sprouts. He scolded every rabbit who crept into the willow copse for shade. Until finally there was not a creature in Hazeltop Grove who had a good word for him. Now, of course, on this extremely hot day, with his usual selfishness, he had taken possession of the pennyroyal, and was enjoying himself immensely, when his eye chanced to fall on a strange rabbit hopping through the grove. At once he was on his feet and advancing toward Cottontail (for it was he).

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"My name is Cottontail," answered the visitor, "and I live in Mulberry Swamp. I have come for a bit of pennyroyal."

"Oh, indeed," answered Proudfoot rudely. "But you see I happen to be occupying the pennyroyal myself, and I certainly do not intend to allow you on the premises."

Now this made Cottontail very angry, for the pennyroyal patch was common property, and he started at

once in that direction.

But Proudfoot with an ugly look made a rush at him, and there at once promised to be a terrible quarrel had not something quite unexpected happened at that moment.

From the underbrush, only a few yards distant, burst a pack of hounds. Almost instantly they spied the rabbits and made a dash in their direction.

"Run," shrieked Proudfoot, "run!" and he at once darted off toward the grove, part of the pack at his heels. But Cottontail, remembering some advice his grandmother had once given him, slipped quietly into the pennyroyal and crouched low. The hounds who had not given chase to Proudfoot circled round and round, each time coming nearer and nearer, and smelling the air. Now they stopped and listened, and the rabbit couching in the pennyroyal trembled with fear. Was his grandmother right? Would a strong whiff of pennyroyal throw the hounds off the scent? To the very edge of the patch they came, and finally hesitating a moment, dropped their noses to the ground and were off in the direction of the grove.

Cottontail carefully raised his head and looked about him.

"Phew!" he remarked, "I had a narrow escape that time, sure enough. I wouldn't be in Proudfoot's shoes for a good deal. I certainly hope that he will escape, though he was rather mean about that pennyroyal."

* * * *

"I think that Cottontail must have been a very wise rabbit," remarked Eric.

"Oh yes, he was wise," answered Yota, "but not a bit wiser than Thumper who lived in Mulberry Swamp. I will tell you about him, too, when you come back another evening."

CHAPTER IV

Wise Old Thumper.

THUMPER was a very old Cotton Tail, who lived with a colony of rabbits in Mulberry Swamp. He was much older than any of the rabbits in the vicinity—in fact no one knew exactly how old he was, not even Thumper himself.

One day there appeared in Mulberry Swamp a strange rabbit, a big black one, with a single white tuft on the side of his head. The newcomer went by the name of Tufty. Now Tufty had not been many hours in Mulberry Swamp before he was told about Thumper. The younger rabbits advised Tufty to make friends with Thumper at once, but Tufty intended to do nothing of the kind. The truth of the matter was that Tufty had made himself so disagreeable in Blackberry Grove whence he had come, that the other rabbits had practically driven him out, and he had come to seek new quarters, intending to make himself ruler of the new colony. So he resolved to pay no attention whatever to the old rabbit nor to take any advice he might offer. However he was curious to see what kind of a creature this wonderful rabbit might be, and he started out for the pennyroyal patch, thinking that he might meet him there, and sure enough it was not long before the old rabbit appeared. When Thumper saw the strange rabbit in the pennyroyal patch, he stopped and thumped the ground with a back leg, which was his way of saying, "How do you do?" Tufty, who had had a good nip of pennyroyal was feeling rather affable,

and answered the challenge with a thump of his own back leg.

"Where do you come from?" asked Thumper, civily enough.

"From Blackberry Grove," answered the other, "but I'm not going back. I've found a nice comfortable haystack in Mr. Man's barn, and I intend to settle myself there for the winter."

"Oh, I certainly should not advise you to go there!" said Thumper quickly. "The farmer keeps several cats and an old hound too."

"Poof!" answered Tufty loftily. "I'm not afraid of a couple of cats and an old toothless hound."

"If you take my advice," said Thumper earnestly, "you will not go near Mr. Man's barn. Come with me and I will show you a nice safe retreat in the corner of the swamp under an old tree root."

"You surely don't think I am going to live in an old mudhole like that!" said Tufty. "Anyway I didn't ask for your advice in the first place."

Now Thumper could see that the other was determinded, so he shook his head sadly and went on his way, remarking to himself, "Some harm is sure to come to that rabbit!"

But even Thumper did not expect it so quickly. The very next morning as he was passing through the orchard, he heard Peter, the old hound, barking loudly. He managed to creep near enough to see what was happening. Under one corner of the haystack crouched the panic-stricken Tufty, while not three feet away stood the "toothless hound" waiting for the rabbit to make one move ere he pounced upon him.

Now as I said before, Thumper was a wise old rabbit, and it must be a desperate situation indeed from which he could not find a means of escape. Creeping

up to the haystack from the other side, he brushed as close as he could to Tufty. "Run!" he called. "Follow me!" and he was off, the frightened Tufty, following, the dog close on their heels.

Round and round they went, cutting circle after circle, until they came to a fallen tree. Along the trunk of the tree both the rabbits flew. As they reached the upturned root Thumper jumped into it, calling for Tufty to do the same. Tufty was so thoroughly frightened by this time that he did exactly as he was bid, and the rabbits crouched low, scarcely breathing.

Peter, the hound who had followed, now paused. When they had leaped into the tree-root he had lost the scent. Round and round he circled, passing very close to the rabbits, but never thinking of looking up. Finally he gave it up and with nose to the ground he trailed off to the wood.

Then the rabbits drew a breath of relief and came down from their hiding place. And Tufty? Well, you may know what Tufty thought about it when I tell you that the best friend that Thumper now has in the whole colony, is the big black rabbit with the white tuft, who lives in the corner of the swamp under an old tree root.

* * * *

"Yota," said Eric, "you have never told us any stories about reindeer."

"Well—" answered Yota, hesitatingly, "I don't believe that I know any about reindeer exactly—"

At this Nat looked at Yota out of the corner of his eye. "Is it possible," he said pityingly, "that creatures who are such great travellers, and who hold themselves to be the wisest of the wild birds should never have

"Poof!" answered Tufty loftily, "I'm not afraid . . ."

seen a reindeer?" But Yota only sniffed and looked in the opposite direction.

"Oh, Nat," exclaimed Eric, throwing his arms around the old dog's neck, "do you know anything about reindeer? Do tell us a story."

"I'm like Yota," replied Nat tantalizingly, "we'll have to wait till tomorrow for it, because it's too late tonight," and he walked off looking very superior.

Eric knew, though, that Nat was only pretending to be haughty, because he was too really good a dog to have mean feelings.

CHAPTER V

The Story of Fleetfoot.

IN the fenced-in enclosure of a city park lived a herd of reindeer. Beautiful little creatures they were with their glossy coats, and bright shining eyes. Day after day they roamed over the hillside, always taking the same paths, coming at the same hour each day to the feeding trough to receive their portion of food. One of the most beautiful of the flock was Fleetfoot.

Fleetfoot was more friendly than any of the herd. When visitors came to the park, he would advance fearlessly and receive food from their hands.

One day there came a little boy with his mother, and as usual Fleetfoot came forward to be petted.

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed the boy, as he patted the deer through the wires, "I'm sure this must be one of Santa Claus' reindeer! He looks exactly like the picture in my new story-book. Oh, how do you suppose he ever came to be shut up in there? How I should like to let him out, so that he could go back to the forest!"

Long after they had passed, Fleetfoot stood and thought about the words of the little boy.

"The forest," he said, "I wonder what is in the forest?" The more he thought about it the more he wished that he might see the forest.

Just then there came along the old hunting dog, Nap, who lived at the lodge of the gatekeeper.

"Where are you going?" called the reindeer.

"To the forest," answered the dog.

"May I go with you?" asked Fleetfoot.

"Come along," said the dog.

"But how?" asked Fleetfoot. "How shall I get out?"

"Your legs were made for jumping," answered Nap, looking at the fence. Almost before he knew it, Fleetfoot was over the fence, and they turned toward the forest. Soon the trees grew thicker and the undergrowth more dense. They stopped on the edge of a dense pine grove.

"Is this the forest?" asked Fleetfoot.

"Part of it," answered Nap.

At first the reindeer advanced timidly; never before had he been compelled to break his way—but as they went on he gained confidence and holding his head in the air, stepped quickly.

"Here is where your kind, the wild deer, find shelter in the winter," said Nap, as he led Fleetfoot to a thick growth of pine trees whose branches swept the ground. Fleetfoot stopped and with nostrils widely distended sniffed the fragrant air. He was becoming excited.

"Yes, yes," he said, "and is this the whole forest?"

"Oh, no," answered Nap. "Soon we come to the marsh."

It was as he had said, in a short time they came to a great marshy expanse.

"That," explained Nap, "is where the wild deer escape their enemies. They are so light and agile that they bound over the marsh as no other creature of any weight could possibly do."

Fleetfoot's feet were moving restlessly up and down, and he made queer little jumps in the air. Finally he darted forward and bounded over the marsh as

light as a feather, picking his way daintily on the great mud clods, missing every water hole as he went.

On they went, the dog and the reindeer. The woods grew thicker, and the dog began to find difficulty in travelling. But the reindeer dug his sharp little hoofs in the frozen ground and mounted higher and higher the incline which rose before them. As they advanced it became colder, and poor Nap shivered in every limb, but Fleetfoot's eyes sparkled, and every hair in his coat stood up straight in the fine sharp air.

"Let us go back," said Nap. "You have seen the forest. Let us go back to our nice warm shelter in the park."

But the reindeer would not stop. "Ah, no, I must go on," he said, never stopping in his steady climb toward the heights.

Nap stood a moment watching Fleetfoot as he mounted high above him, and then he turned, shivering, and trotted steadily back toward civilization.

Fleetfoot never looked once behind. Something beckoned him on and on. The slopes became ice-covered and pine trees drooped heavily with snow. Suddenly he stopped, head held high. A sound had reached his ears, the tap, tap of many hoofs on ice-covered surfaces. Fleetfoot's breath came in gasps and he made queer snorting noises with his nose. In a moment there came a herd of reindeer, beautiful little creatures with glossy coats and bright shining eyes.

As they came up to him, Fleetfoot said: "Who are you?"

"We are Santa Claus' reindeer," they answered. "And we live on this mountain top. We have just returned from our Christmas journey to the little children of the world."

"Santa Claus' reindeer!" repeated Fleetfoot, and now he understood many things. He knew why he had never been satisfied in the city park, why he could skip lightly over the marshes, climb steep slopes, and why the cold and snow thrilled him as nothing else could. He, too, was one of Santa Claus' reindeer, and he had come into his own. As the herd of little reindeer turned again toward the mountain, Fleetfoot bounded joyfully beside them.

* * * *

"Why, Nat," cried Eric, when the story was finished. "I do believe that dog was you!"

"Well," answered Nat, "you know it's not only wild geese who have adventures," and he looked triumph-

"We are Santa Claus' Reindeer," they answered.

antly at Yota. But that old goose simply tucked her head under her wing and said nothing.

After a moment's silence Eric said, "Nat, I think that was the best story we have had." At this Yota suddenly uncovered her head.

"I can tell you," said she quietly, "a much stranger story than that—a story of the shores of our northern-marshlands—of a performance which no human eye has ever seen. Come tomorrow at this time, and you shall hear it."

CHAPTER VI

The Dance of the Cranes.

THERE was a general air of festivity about the Marsh. All the animals were looking forward to the great Crane Dance. For several days the cranes had been gathering in one part of the Marsh, and had been giving forth their queer trumpetlike calls as they flew back and forth over the surrounding country.

These cranes came from the tropical regions where they passed the winters, and their journeys covered enormous distances. They had been coming here for years, using the same nests year after year, raising their young, and then departing for regions unknown. They were majestic creatures and seemed to hold themselves so aloof, that they appeared out of place in the Marsh. Day after day they would wade about the muddy shores catching frogs and fish. Sometimes they would stand motionless for hours at a time, gazing far off across the water as if looking vainly for something that never came.

In appearance they were very beautiful creatures, their dull grey feathers and long wing plumes being enlivened by scarlet neck ornaments. Their long graceful necks and trumpetlike beaks seemed to be especially formed to produce the queer calls which were to be heard constantly about the Marsh. Long slender legs added very little weight to their bodies, so that their wonderful flights were unencumbered. Once a year, soon after their arrival at the Marsh, their

strange dance took place. This year, as usual, all the birds in the vicinity were asked to attend.

At last the evening came. The first to arrive were the wild ducks. They selected a corner near the geese, and with much quacking settled themselves to await the entertainment. Then came the gulls from their Island in the Lake. Like a white cloud they appeared and sailed softly to the water's surface. They were so accustomed to the rocking of the waves on the Lake, that unconsciously they kept up the gentle undulating movement on the Marsh's glassy surface.

None of the four-footed animals were invited. But just the same Danny Muskrat kept rushing to the door of his house, and although he well understood it was to be a party for birds only, he could not resist swimming across to Paddy Beaver's and telling him of the celebration to take place that evening.

Now arrived the land birds. As soon as it was quite dark, came brown owls and grey owls, our old friend Tawny Owl, too, and perched themselves about in the low branches of the trees. A large number of crows were there—great black creatures, who walked about with much cawing and a proprietary air of having planned the whole entertainment themselves. Even Downy Woodpecker and his wife were present—a little sleepy to be sure, as it was long past their bed time—Downy looking particularly handsome in his scarlet head-dress.

And now it seemed that all had arrived. The moon rose slowly over the hills, and looked upon a queer gathering indeed. After the preliminary bustle attending the settling of this motley collection of wild birds, all had lapsed into quietness. The owls, the woodpeckers, and the crows in the branches of the trees, and

the ducks, the geese, and the gulls, from their place on the Marsh, awaited in silence.

Presently, on a grassy knoll in the full glow of the moonlight, appeared two cranes. Like two grey shadows they advanced, until they stood facing one another, then suddenly wheeled, and making a low bow, each touched his beak to the ground, and leaped high in the air. And then began the strangest, weirdest dance! Half flying, half dancing came the two performers, their wings dragging at their sides, their beaks held high. Faster and faster they flew, until the visiting birds grew dizzy with the sight.

In the full glow of the moonlight appeared two cranes.

And then, as mysteriously as they had come they floated off into the mist and disappeared in the shadows. Silently, one by one, the visiting birds left the Marsh, the charm of the weird performance still upon them. Thus ended once more that annual event, the moonlight Dance of the Cranes.

* * * *

"That was a very nice story, Yota," said Eric, when the goose had finished. I liked that one very much, didn't you Nat?" turning to the dog. But Nat made no reply, to all appearances he was fast asleep.

"Nat," said Eric severely, "you are very impolite. Besides you missed a very entertaining story."

"Perhaps I was just playing possum," remarked Nat looking at Yota.

"Possum?" inquired the goose, looking puzzled.

"Hm!" said Nat importantly. "Of course not every one can learn to play possum. It reminds me of how Bushtail, the squirrel, tried to play possum.

"It's a fairly long story, however," he said, scratching his ear thoughtfully, "I think we'll have to leave it for tomorrow. One tale an evening is about enough!"

CHAPTER VII

Bushtail Plays Possum.

MR. POSSUM stirred himself lazily and yawned under the cover of leaves. This business of getting up was a real ordeal to him. He would have much preferred to sleep right on through the night—only one did get so fearfully hungry. He poked his sharp hairless nose out of the matted leaves and looked sleepily about him.

"Hello Whiskers," called a voice. "You are the hardest person to waken I ever came across. I believe you are pretending to sleep half the time. This is the third time I've called you this evening and I'm about tired of it. Well, I never!" he went on, as the sleepy Possum bored under the leaves once more, and prepared to cuddle down for another snooze. "I tell you, Whiskers, this is the last time I'm going to take the trouble to come out and waken you for your supper."

When Mr. Possum heard this threat he roused himself in earnest. He had always had such difficulty waking in time for his meals, that he had made a bargain with Bushtail to call him every night for a week in exchange for a dozen hickory-nuts.

"I'm sorry, Bushtail," he said, apologetically. "I'll add a dozen acorns to those hickory nuts if you'll not desert me." But Bushtail still hesitated. It certainly was exasperating to have Whiskers behave as he had this day.

"I'll tell you," said Whiskers. "I'll teach you a trick if you'll promise to stick to your bargain. I'll teach

you how to escape from foxes and hounds at a moment's notice. It's a trick that possums very seldom give away. How would you like to learn to play possum?"

"Possum?" said Bushtail, "how could I play possum when I am a squirrel?"

"Easy enough," said Whiskers. "You know how we possums always seem to escape, and what poor runners we are at that? It's just because we know how to play this possum trick."

"Well," said Bushtail, settling himself beside Whiskers. "If you'll really teach me a trick that will save my life once, I'll promise to waken you every night for the rest of the summer."

"The trick," said Whiskers, "is to lie perfectly still when danger is near. You know how nervous you are, Bushtail, and how you jump at every sound. You must learn to lie as if dead when a fox or a hound is after you, and even if they nose about you, you must still lie quiet. Then they will think you are dead and will go away."

"Bushtail looked rather dubious at this, but it certainly was an easy way to escape if there was any truth in it. At any rate he was willing to try when Whiskers proposed giving him a lesson.

"Proceed," he said to Possum.

"Lie right flat on your back and close your eyes," Whiskers said.

Bushtail lay down but Whiskers had some trouble getting him to straighten out, also his eyes kept flying open and his sides heaved. But finally he managed to lie almost quiet for a second.

"There!" said Whiskers, "now lie that way until I count ten, and just imagine that a big owl is standing

over you, ready to bite you to death. One, two, three," but before he had reached five Bushtail had sprung into the air, and knocked off a big bug that was crawling on his ear.

He managed to lie quiet almost for a second.

"Dear, dear!" said Whiskers, "this will never do. You must lie quiet if you want to learn the possum act."

"I thought it was the owl biting me," said Bushtail.

"Now try again," said Whiskers. Bushtail laid himself down again in the bottom of the Possum's den, and stretched himself out as limply as he could. This time he did pretty well. Whiskers even pinched him a little,

and all he did was to twitch his leg. They were progressing very well with the lesson when there came an interruption. Mrs. Whiskers arrived with her four children. The funny way in which she carried them made Bushtail snicker. Every one of the little possums were clinging to their mother's back with its tail wrapped around hers for safety. When they saw Bushtail lying on the ground the young Possums began poking their cold noses about him in a manner most disagreeable and, when one of them twitched his ear it was more than he could stand, and he flew to his feet like a flash, and glared angrily at the young possum.

"My, but you are nervous!" said Mrs. Whiskers.

"But he's doing fine," said Whiskers. "Just lie down and show them what you can do," he said to the nervous squirrel.

Bushtail lay down resolved to do his best, so that the young Possums would not laugh at him. Just then there was a sound from above, a peculiar scratching, and every one of the Possum family fell over on his side and lay as if dead. There was nothing left for poor Bushtail but to do the same. So he lay there in their midst with shaking legs and heaving sides.

"That's a strange looking Possum," came a voice from without. "Looks more like a squirrel to me, but what's he doing in a possum den, I should like to know." Down into the depths of the possum den was lowered a stick. "Tap, tap!" it went on the squirrel's head. That was enough for the excited Bushtail. Giving one leap he bounded into the air, and landed full on the head of the surprised coon, who had been mischievously tickling him with the lowered stem. Giving the coon

a few angry digs, he disappeared in the wood. Playing possum, he decided, was too much for him.

* * * *

"That just proves," remarked Yota, when the dog had finished, "that a leopard cannot change his spots."

"What do you mean by that, Yota?" asked Eric.

"Why," answered Yota, "it was impossible for that squirrel to behave like a possum, no matter how hard he tried. And tomorrow, if you like, I'll tell you about a foolish eagle who tried to be a goose."

CHAPTER VIII.

The Eagle Who Could Not Be a Goose.

AWAY up among the Rocky Mountains of northwestern Canada, on an overhanging cliff, was an eagle's nest. The nest was made of dry twigs and saplings, and was so woven and interlaced that it made a very strong network. Every year the nest was enlarged and added to, until now it had gained the proportions of a small hut. The same pair of eagles returned to this nest year after year, reared their young, and then left for parts unknown.

A little way from the cliff on which dwelt the eagles was a tiny pond, formed by the crevice between two boulders, and here lived for a part of each year a flock of wild geese. The mossy banks, lichens and half stunted weed afforded all that was needed in the way of food. Now the geese knew very well that the eagles inhabited the cliff, but in spite of this they continued to live there. You see the presence of the eagles, although a danger in itself, really served to keep away the more to be dreaded one—Mr. Fox.

Of course it was necessary for the geese to be very watchful, and it fell to the lot of Dono, the very oldest goose of the flock, and not good for much else, to keep a constant vigil. Every morning the parent eagles, after feeding their young, flew away and seldom returned until night, and then, only, could poor Dono have any rest.

But one night the eagles did not return. Dono thought that with her failing eye sight she might not

have noticed them, and so in the morning she watched carefully, but no eagles left the nest. Patiently she waited with her eye on the overhanging cliff. Through the morning stillness at last came a sound—a plaintive, alarmed, and rather angry cry, and at once Dono knew it was the voice of a young eaglet.

"Something must have happened to the eagles," said Dono. Hesitating only a moment, the old goose rose into the air over the cliff to a position in which she could look directly down upon the nest. There in the midst of the rough twigs, lay a young half-fledged bird. All about him were feathers, and fur, and bones of the creatures which had fallen prey to the eagles.

Conquering her repugnance, Dono dropped to the edge of the nest. The young one raised his long neck and opened his gaping beak in a most hideous fashion. When he saw it was the goose and not his parents, he was very angry.

"Where is my mother?" he shrieked, "How dare she leave me here to starve?"

Now the old goose did not like the look of the creature at all—nor the manner in which he addressed her, but just the same she was an honourable old goose and could not leave any helpless creature to starve.

"If you will keep quiet a moment, I will bring you something," she said at last. With that the young one ceased his piercing cries and almost instantly Dono was back with a fish in her beak. But when the eaglet saw the fish he became furious.

"Do you think I eat such stuff?" he said. "Bring me a partridge at once!" But there was a limit to the old goose's patience. She nipped the eaglet sharply on the neck. "Eat that," she said, "or nothing!" The young one seeing that the goose was in earnest, swallowed the fish, and yet another—but with much grum-

bling. Finally he was satisfied and the goose flew back to the flock.

The next day passed and the next. The old eagles did not return and Dono continued to feed her foster child. Gradually the eaglet came to look for the daily visit of the old goose, and lost his fierce look, and Dono herself became fond of him and began to look upon him as one of her own.

But the day came when the eaglet was full-fledged, and would not longer stay in his nest. Over the edge he tumbled one day, and lit on the ground near the goose pond. From now on the eagle lived with the geese, and the strange part of it was he really thought himself a goose, and nearly drowned himself several times trying to swim with the goslings.

Before long it came time for the geese to be moving south, and in their train was the eagle who really considered himself one of them. As they journeyed southward they met with many other birds, and there was great excitement among them when they saw that Dono had an eagle among her flock. Constantly they surrounded the geese and remarked loudly about the eagle.

"Why do they call me an eagle?" he asked finally. "Am I not a wild goose like the rest of you?"

"Yes, yes," said Dono soothingly, "you are a very fine bird." You see Dono had set her heart upon training the wild bird of prey into a harmless one like herself.

Soon they left the wild mountain regions and came nearer to civilization. One day they flew over a farm where there was a chicken yard. The geese, of course, flew unconcernedly along, and never bothered looking at the domestic fowl, but the eagle was very strangely affected. As he heard the cackling of the hens he

"Do you think I eat such stuff?"

stopped and hung poised in the air, head downwards. Suddenly, before Dono knew what had happened, he had darted to the earth in the midst of the chicken yard, and striking his talons deep in one of the hens, rose with it in his grasp. The rest of the chickens flew about in a panic. "An Eagle!" they shrieked and dashed for the hen house. Much to Dono's astonishment the eagle paid no attention whatever to her calls, but flew steadily on, the hen in his talons, and disappeared into the forest.

For two days there was no sign whatever of the eagle, then suddenly he reappeared near the flock. Now the younger geese were frightened of their old-time companion, and flew far from him, but Dono waited until he approached. Rather shamefacedly he came.

"I know now," he said. "I am an eagle, and I must live as eagles do. But we can still be friends, for I shall never harm you or yours."

Now Dono was greatly disappointed for she had set her heart on taming this wild creature. But she saw now that it was not possible. As the young eagle soared high into the air toward some cliffs, she heaved a great sigh, and shaking her head said sadly to herself: "One is never too old to learn. A leopard cannot change his spots. Neither can an eagle his disposition."

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"Yota," said Eric, when the goose had finished the story of the eagle, "what fierce, cruel, birds those eagles must be. Don't you know any stories about the friendly birds?"

"Perhaps you would like to hear about Mr. and Mrs. Downy Woodpecker, and how they went house hunting," suggested Yota.

"Oh, yes," answered Eric, "do tell about the Woodpeckers."

"Very well then," said Yota, "Mr. and Mrs. Downy Woodpecker it shall be tomorrow."

CHAPTER IX

The Woodpeckers Go House Hunting.

"WELL, my dear," said Mr. Downy Woodpecker to his wife one sun-shiny morning in April, "it's time for our spring moving.

"Oh," said Mrs. Downy, "I had almost forgotten that we had to move; we have been so comfortable in this old hollow tree that I hate to leave it."

Downy looked around the cozily protected hollow, placed on the under side of the limb, before he answered with a sigh, "Yes, it has been a nice safe retreat, but you know that it needs renovating, and the best thing to do is to move into new quarters."

So Mrs. Downy hastily made her toilet, which consisted of preening a few tail feathers, took an approving and rather envious glance at Downy's scarlet topknot (you know she has none herself), and flew proudly away with her spouse to look up a new lodging.

First they visited an orchard close to a white farm house. They flew eagerly about from one tree to another, and finally came to a gnarled old apple tree with a hollow limb which looked as if it might be just the thing. They peered inquisitively into the branches, Downy testing the thickness of the bark with a resounding tatoo. "Rat-tat-tat!" went Downy's sharp little beak. "Rat-tat-tat!" echoed Mrs. Downy. So engrossed did they become, that they were unaware of the approach of two small boys, until they stood directly under the tree in which the Woodpeckers were hopping about. The two birds drew back in the branches and

stayed very still, when they heard the older boy say to the younger.

"You go home and get your sling-shot. I heard a Woodpecker around here, and we'll have some sport."

Mr. and Mrs. Woodpecker looked at each other in consternation. How lucky that they had overheard the conversation before they had actually started nest building! And why, oh, why were humans so cruel, when all one wanted was a hollow tree trunk, and a few worms and insects to eat? So the pair turned sadly away and continued their search.

As they passed through the Little Wood, they were greeted by Bluebird, and they told him of the narrow escape they had had. Now Bluebird, who possesses a very lovely disposition, and always wants to have everyone about him happy, told them at once of a nice safe retreat near to his own in the large ground surrounding a gentleman's residence.

"A gentleman," said Bluebird, "who is very fond of us Woods People, and actually builds houses for us to live in. There is one in the next tree to mine," continued Bluebird, "and I believe it was just made for you Downy, for it is round like a log, and has a doorway up much higher than the others, so that you would be safe in the bottom."

Now woodpecker does not really build a nest. He just hollows out a tree trunk and the chips which fall in make a nice bed for Mrs. Woodpecker to lay her eggs upon. So the house Beautiful Bluebird described sounded just right to the Woodpeckers and they quite willingly accompanied him to the spot.

Never in Mrs. Downy's wildest dreams had she imagined such a lovely convenient spot. Nearly every tree in the beautiful park contained a cozy little house for some wild bird.

First, there was Bluebird's house. It consisted of birch bark fixed to a pine slab and looked as natural as the forest itself. Next to this was a saucy-looking little house made from a piece of slap-board with the bark left on. The opening of this quaint little house

Near the centre of an old elm tree was a simple piece of log.

was no larger than a twenty-five cent piece. This tiny domicile, explained Bluebird, belonged to Jenny Wren, and here she had already raised one family of little ones, free from the worries and cares that usually beset her at that time.

Every house was as simple and as near to Nature as it could be. And for safety from cats, a barbed wire had been wound around each tree well below the nest.

"The gentleman," said Mr. Woodpecker, "must know a great deal about us wild birds."

Mrs. Downy now began to grow impatient to see their own nest. You see it was near resting time, and she was very eager to be settled in a home.

Bluebird, seeing Mrs. Downy's impatience, hurried to the spot. Near the centre of an old elm tree, fastened securely to a branch, was a simple piece of log. It had been hollowed out, just as Woodpecker himself would have done, and near the top was a small opening for a doorway. Needless to say the Woodpeckers were delighted and Mrs. Woodpecker at once went to work lining the bottom of the cavity with sticks and bark. Downy thanked Bluebird very heartily for his kindness in bringing them to the spot and was soon busily helping his wife in the nest building. Thus was the Woodpecker's house problem settled for another year.

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"We would have more Woodpeckers about here," remarked Eric, "if we could get rid of the crows. Crows are a nuisance," he went on. "They eat the grain, and they even dig up the newly sprouted corn. They rob the nests of birds smaller than themselves and kill the young, and I don't like crows," he added as a finality.

Yota was silent for a moment, then she said quietly, "You certainly make Mr. Crow's case look pretty black. But I believe you will think differently after you hear the story I am going to tell you the next time you come over to see me."

CHAPTER X

The Crows and the Silver Money.

ONCE in the heart of a dense pine forest lived a flock of crows. There were large crows and small crows, crows with jet black shiny feathers, and some that were not at all shiny. The crows did not live here the year round. In the summer they scattered over the country and picked grain and berries, and some of them, it must be confessed, lived upon birdlings and eggs.

Now there are some folks who think that a crow's a crow, and that one is as bad as another. But that certainly was not true of this flock. The flock was divided into two bands, each having its leader, and for generations there had been a struggle between the two for supremacy, sometimes one gaining and holding the leadership, and sometimes the other. There was as much difference in the two bands as there is in day and night. The one led quite commendable lives, eating only grain, berries, caterpillars and worms. The worms and caterpillars they destroyed for the farmer they decided, paid for the small amount of grain they ate. But the other band led real outlaw lives. They fell upon young rabbits and squirrels, and every bird's nest they came upon they plundered.

The leader of the wicked crows was called Terrible Claws. The other leader was named Whitefeather, for the reason that long ago one of this band had boasted of one pure white feather among all the jet

black ones. The members of the Whitefeathers had always lived most honourable lives, and when they were in power the farmer folk had nothing bad to say of the crows.

But now it was the wicked Terrible Claws who held the leadership, and there was nothing but plunder far and wide. The Whitefeathers, meanwhile, were forced to sit back and at least not interfere in the evil doings.

Quite near the pine grove was an old tumble down ruin. It had been the dwelling house of one of the earliest pioneers, and there was nothing much left but the crumbling foundation of a deep cellar. It was the favorite meeting place of Terrible Claws and his tribe. Here they held noisy debates, and often fought among themselves.

One day while pottering around in the crumbling stone they came upon an old tin box with stout clasps. As they scratched about the box rolled down to the bottom of the pit, with a great rattling and clatter of whatever was inside. Now, every one knows that a crow is very curious, and naturally they at once wanted to know what was within.

"It sounds very much like silver money," said Terrible Claws. When the flock heard this they fell upon the box in great haste, for strange as it may seem, there is nothing a crow likes so much as silver of any kind. But the clasp resisted all their efforts. Finally, Terrible Claws flew high in the air with it in his grasp, and let it drop on a stone in the bottom of the pit, as they often did with clam shells that were hard to open. But still the box remained tightly closed.

Standing about they were regarding it rather hopelessly, when they heard a voice say:

Terrible claws flew high in the air with it in his grasp.

"Shall I come down and open it for you?" Looking up they saw the head of old Squire Fox peering over the wall. Now, the crows had really never had anything whatever to do with Mr. Fox. They had always been a little suspicious of the old fellow, but now their curiosity and greed got the better of them, and Terrible Claws said politely, "if you will do us the favor of opening the box, we will give you one of the coins within. Meaning all the time to do nothing of the kind, but to fly away with it directly it was opened.

So the fox jumped down into the pit, the crows meanwhile standing well back. He bit at the lock pulled it this way and that, but still it would not open.

"Can you make out what is in the box?" asked Terrible Claws.

"Oh, I'm sure it is money, or silver of some kind," said the crafty fox. With that they all crowded close. "Hear how it rattles," said the fox. Closer still came the crows in their greed. Suddenly Squire Fox turned, and as quick as a flash had pounced on Terrible Claws. The rest of the crows, giving one terrified caw, rose in the air and left their unhappy leader to his fate. And you may be sure that Mr. Fox made short work of Terrible Claws.

The wicked crows now deprived of their leader left the country for good, and thus once more came into power the Whitefeathers. And although many farmer folk remembering the bad traits of Terrible Claws and his flock, still rush for their guns immediately they see a crow about the place, there are still some who will say that a crow is not as black as he is painted.

* * * *

"That's once," said Eric, "when Mr. Fox did somebody a good turn." "And about the only time," added

Yota, "Mr. Fox is the greatest villain in the woods, to my notion."

"H'm," remarked Nat, "you seem to forget that Mr. Fox has to eat to live. I feel rather sorry for the old fellow myself."

"I'm not surprised," answered Yota disdainfully, "I always thought that you and Squire Fox had much in common. In fact I have a suspicion that you and he are relatives."

"Even if Nat does look like Mr. Fox, he is not a bit like him in disposition," said Eric impulsively coming to the old dog's rescue. "Why, he wouldn't harm a fly, would you Nat?" and Nat wagged his tail so hard that Yota moved quickly over to the other side of Eric.

"I can tell you a story about Mr. Fox myself," said Nat, "and I will too, if you will only give me a chance tomorrow evening."

CHAPTER XI

Thumper and Tufty Escape the Trap.

BLACK WING was a coal black raven who lived in the wood near Mulberry Swamp. Not only was Black Wing dark in color, but his reputation was as deep dyed as himself. There was not a greater villain to be found in the vicinity unless it was that other crafty individual Sly Nose the fox.

Now Sly Nose and Black Wing were great friends, as is usually the case when two villains come together, and most of the calamities which took place in the vicinity could be traced to these two. Many a fine young cottontail fell prey to the insatiable appetite of Mr. Fox, and that always meant that Black Wing came in for his share of the booty in the shape of meaty bones to pick.

Now there were two fine rabbits in the swamp whom Sly Nose had had his eye on for some time, but so far he had been unsuccessful in enticing them into any kind of a trap. Thumper and Tufty seemed to be always on the alert, and kept mostly to the open where they could trust to their strong legs to take them out of any difficulty.

This morning as usual they met in the space beyond the willow thicket and sat down on their long back legs for a chat.

"How are things with you this morning, Tufty?" asked Thumper.

"Not any too well, not any too well," answered Tufty grumblingly. "I haven't had a good night's

sleep for a week. Those squealing field mice have been boring around my nest, and have made such a draft that the cold has affected my legs. I'm sure I'll have rheumatism if they keep it up much longer."

"You ought to move out of that musty old stone heap, Tufty. You are welcome to my old nest under that willow stump. It was always fine and dry, and it is lined with soft grass. It's about the only vacant nest hereabouts that old Sly Nose hasn't dug out," he added. "Come along, we'll go and look at it now," and he and Tufty started toward the willow hedge which lay on the other side of the swamp.

He began wiping his dirty beak on Tufty's thick fur.

The two rabbits became so interested in their plans for the moving of Tufty's quarters, that they did not realize that they were well within the enclosure surrounded by a high thicket. They were startled by a croaking voice.

"Good morning to you two cottontails, welcome to my domain," and they looked up to see Black Wing, the raven, stalking from the thicket.

Thumper and Tufty answered the raven's greeting civilly enough, but having no great fondness for the society of such a rascal, they were proceeding on their way when Black Wing stepped up before them.

"Don't be in such a hurry, my fine young friends. Stop and have a bite with me. There is someone here who would like very much to meet you. Perhaps you have heard of Mr. Fox. He is really a very fine fellow—only he picks his bones too clean. Mr. Fox has been wanting you two gentlemen to dine with him for some time. Ah! here is Sly Nose himself," went on the Raven, and as he stepped aside Old Sly Nose came into view.

The sight of the grinning fox standing in the opening which was their only means of escape, struck terror to the hearts of the two rabbits. The raven now advanced quite close to them, and began wiping his dirty beak on Tufty's thick fur. But Tufty's two black legs shot out, and struck the Raven full on the breast, so that he rolled over and over in the dirt. He picked himself up and his anger was terrible to behold. Coming up behind the two rabbits he pulled great tufts of fur from their beautiful coats, and jostled them about in a disgraceful manner. And all the time he was driving them closer to the fox.

Sly Nose's eyes sparkled in anticipation of the feast he was soon to have, and his teeth snapped together

threateningly. The poor cottontails shook in every limb, they felt that their last days had come, for they could see no possible escape.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the fox. "At last I have you two wise rabbits. I have waited for you long enough," and he crouched about to spring, when an inquisitive insect settled on his nose. He brushed at it with his paw, and still it clung, and rolling over and over in the dirt, he at last succeeded in tearing the thing, whatever it was, away.

Blinded by the flying dust, he got to his feet and looked for his two prisoners. But not a sign of them was there anywhere about. Thumper and Tufty had lost no time in leaping for safety, and were well on their way to Mulberry Swamp. The Raven, too, fearing the fox's wrath, had disappeared. And Old Sly Nose, dirty and very angry, slunk off to his nest to nurse his injured nose.

* * * *

"What a terrible bird the raven must be!" exclaimed Eric. "I am glad there are not any near here."

"You probably are very glad then," said Yota, "that the ravens were not among the wild birds who migrated to Canada."

"Why," said Eric, much surprised, "have there not always been birds in Canada?"

"Well," answered Yota, "this is the way the story goes. You may believe it or not, just as you like. Of course I cannot vouch for it myself."

CHAPTER XII

How the Birds Came to Canada.

A LONG time ago, so long that no one now living would remember, our Canadian northlands were almost unfrequented by wild birds. No sounds of bird calls broke the stillness of the great forests, the bogs and marshlands sheltered no nesting creatures, and the air was empty of the circling of sea gulls.

Now the good spirit of the northlands, so the tale goes, knew that the forests could not long endure without bird life, that the reeds and inlets would soon grow desolate if there were no nesting creatures, and so he sent out a call to the bird inhabitants of the south.

The southern woods and forests had become so thickly populated with bird life that it was beginning to be very uncomfotable for the birds living there, and when the plight of the northlands became known to them the birds called a council to decide what should be done. After much debating they determined to send out messengers to the various districts to find out exactly the conditions there. The woodpecker represented the land birds, the gull the sea birds and the goose the marsh birds.

Several days passed and the awaiting birds began to grow impatient. Finally on the third day the three messengers appeared. The woodpecker spoke first:

"I find the northlands a wonderful country. There are dense forests, with many old trees where one could hollow out a new nest every day in the year. There are swaying elms for the orioles, sandy cliffs for the

bank swallows, and open meadows for the larks and kingfishers. I should certainly advise the land birds to go to the northlands."

Next came the herring gull. With many circlings he settled gracefully among them. "I don't know what the woodpecker means by the forests," said he. "There are no forests in the northlands. All that I saw was open sea and lake. There one could circle about in the great air places, and be rocked to sleep on the white crest of the undulating waves. There could be no more perfect spot in the world for the water birds."

They determined to send messengers to the various districts.

Now the bird council began to look at one another uneasily. What could this conflicting report of the land and water birds mean? But now spoke the goose, representative of the marsh birds.

"I am sure," said he, "that both woodpecker and herring gull must be mistaken. There are no forests nor wooded places in the northlands, there are no lakes nor open seas. All is marshland and weeded, boggy inlets filled with fish and wild rice and seaweed. We geese and wild ducks and cranes would find it a perfect paradise there. By all means let the marsh birds move to the northlands."

When this report was finished there was a perfect hubbub of bird voices. The conflicting reports of the messengers were most confusing. What should they do? After much argument and discussion they decided to ask the good spirit of the northland, and this was his explanation:

"In the great northland there are to be found huge forests, open lakes and sea coasts, and marsh lands, too, in plenty. Woodpecker was interested in trees and forests where he might hammer and bore to his heart's content; therefore on his travels he had eyes only for these. Herring gull had no interest in the forests. He demanded only lakes and open sea coasts; hence his assertion that only these things were to be found in the northlands. And the goose—well of course every one knows that a goose will travel miles and miles until he finds that most important of all spots to him—a protected marsh.

The birds thus satisfied, began to move north at once. The woodpecker and the land birds to their woodlands; the gulls and the sea birds to their sea coasts; and the geese and ducks to their beloved marshlands. Thus the good spirit of the north was pleased,

and the great expanses of the northlands became frequented by much bird life.

"This," concluded Yota, "is the story of how the birds came to occupy the northlands. We found the country a veritable bird's paradise, but just as there is never a paradise without its serpent, so it was in this marsh, and the demon of those inland waters was the loon.

Now the loons at a distance look much like ducks. In fact they are often taken for ducks; the two are made very much alike. On closer inspection, however, the difference may be readily seen. The loons are very large, two and a half to three feet long with great wings, and a bill at least three inches long. Their heads are jet black, and their red eyes glitter, giving them a sinister look. Their backs are black and white checked, and the neck band a beautiful iridescent green. The long lance-like beak is also black. They have beautiful slender feet and legs which look as if they seldom touched the ground. They are first and last water birds and although they are so wonderfully alert, on the land they cannot even stand erect without resting on their tails.

They are so swift in all their actions that they are the terror of all the other water creatures. It is almost impossible for hunters to shoot them, for immediately a shot is heard there is a twinkling of many pairs of webbed feet in the air, and every loon in the vicinity will disappear under the surface of the water to reappear some seconds later several yards distant. Then there will break through the stillness that weirdest of sounds, "ha-ha-ha" and again "ha-ha-ha" until the whole marsh will seem to echo with that ironical cry.

Whenever these creatures appear on a marsh, most of the other water birds will disappear—the ducks

and the geese as if by magic, though it often takes more than a loon to move a crane from his statute-like position in the water. But the geese, who are such peace-loving creatures, dislike the loons most heartily, and the loons seem to take particular pleasure in tormenting them. Sometimes they will come upon them unawares and nip them from under the water's surface.

"It is often the loons," concluded Yota, "who keeps us geese moving from place to place. They and Mr. Fox are our greatest enemies."

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"We don't seem to know very much about the gulls," said Eric when Yota had finished. "I suppose it is because they are so seldom seen on land. I have often wondered where they nest and rear their young."

"I could tell you much about the gulls," answered Yota. "They are very secretive about their nests and seldom select a place where there are other birds. There is an island in the northlands where we geese used to rest on our journey to the Arctics which was a favourite spot with the gulls. We used to call it the Island of the Gulls. That story will have to wait, though," she said. "I am tired now, and you, Eric, will be punished if you don't get home soon."

So with many good-nights, as usual, Eric parted from his dear goosie friend, but you may be sure he held her to her promise next evening.

CHAPTER XIII

The Island of the Gulls.

THE island of the gulls was a tiny bit of land far north mid the waters of the Hudson Bay. A bare uninteresting patch of ground it was with scarcely a tree upon it. A spot where you would never have thought of landing even had you been able to reach it for the rocky waters surrounding it. But here in perfect contentment dwelt several families of gulls. They had arrived quite early in the season and had set to work at once building their nests.

The presence of the nests on the island gave it a queer appearance, and it was possible to see it for miles around. The nests, of which there were many, were made of grass, moss, and sticks piled one layer upon another to a height of a foot or more. They measured about three feet across the bottom, and in the centre a deep depression made the best kind of nest. Lined with grass and a few feathers the refuge was complete. The gulls took no pains whatever to hide these nests. In plain sight for miles around rose these queer little mounds, and seemed to invite all kinds of danger.

The gulls do not care for a marshy place, they much prefer a sandy shore or a rocky bank. Their selecting an island for their nesting ground was for the protection it afforded from Mr. Fox, who is their worst enemy, while they are hatching their young.

This was really a very small colony. Sometimes one island will contain as many as a thousand gulls,

for you see the gulls are the most common of all the water birds. They are just about as plentiful among the water fowl as are the sparrows among the land birds.

The gulls are great travellers, and they often follow ships across the ocean. There was one family of gulls on this island who had crossed the ocean three times. They kept close to the boats and lived on the refuse thrown from them.

Had you been able to land upon this island you would have seen running about, gulls of all ages. There were the old gulls with plumage of a dull mottled grey and breast of pure white: there were the younger ones of lighter grey; and the very young ones, soft downy creatures with fluffy white plumage. The old ones were continually diving from the island and coming up with fish in their mouths. These they brought to the young ones who had not yet learned to dive. But before long even the littlest gulls will have been taught many things; how to fly in the teeth of the most terrible storm; how to sleep on the water with head tucked under the wing, rocked by the waves of the deep. Also they will have become quite proficient in diving and bringing up all sorts of small fish, and in catching small birds on the wing, for a gull's appetite is almost insatiable and his chief business in life seems to be to dine well and often.

Thus mid much confusion and tumult does the gull raise her young. And the island of the gulls, although located in such a remote and lonesome region, is about the noisiest place one could imagine.

* * * *

"That reminds me," mused Eric, "of Paddy Beaver. Did you know him?" he asked almost wistfully. "He had a big family, too."

"I know Otto Beaver," replied Yota. "He is a fine fellow, and a wonderful worker. Tomorrow, I shall tell you something about him."

The gulls took no pains whatever to hide these nests.

CHAPTER XIV

Otto, the Beaver.

OTTO came to the door of his house and looked about him. Plainly he was worried about something. First he looked up stream and then down. Then he went back into his house, only to come out again at once. Next, he jumped excitedly into the water and swam swiftly down the river.

Otto is a great big strong beaver, weighing nearly twenty-five pounds. He is about a foot and half long, and has a tail nearly half as long as his body. He is covered with fine silky fur of a greyish-brown color. When he swims in the water the fur flattens down and clings tightly to him so that it is almost waterproof, but when he comes to the surface all that he has to do is give himself a shake or two and he is dry almost at once.

Otto had built himself a house in the bank of the stream. Near him were many other beaver houses—in fact there was a regular little colony of them. Beavers are very sociable little animals, and always build close together for company as well as for safety. That is why trappers when they find one beaver's house always search carefully for rods around, for they know they are pretty sure to find others.

Otto's house was built of mud. It was a little room about three feet square and two feet high, and was plastered on all sides with mud. The floor was also of mud, and was caked so hard that it was almost like a stone. Otto with his wife and baby beavers had

spent the winter here. The ice and snow had piled high above them, but they were very snug and comfortable in the little mud house beneath.

But now summer was coming, and already the stream was beginning to grow shallow. Never before had the water dried up so quickly. Soon the beavers would find their house above the water level and that would not do at all, for then all kinds of animals could come in, and the baby beavers would be in great danger. And this was what was worrying Otto as he stood in his door watching the receding waters. But Otto had an idea! That is what sent him so swiftly

You know what wonderful dams the beavers build.

down stream to consult his neighbours.

You know what wonderful dams the beavers build. This was Otto's plan. He called all the other beavers together and they set to work to dam up the river so that the water could not get out, and would thus remain deep enough to protect their homes. The beavers divided themselves into groups of five or six, and each group set out to cut down a tree. Now this seems like a great undertaking for a little animal, but this is how they did it. First they gnawed the bark off around the tree like a wood-cutter would do with his ax. Then they made a deep gash with their sharp little teeth until the tree fell into the water. When the tree had floated to the spot where the dam was to be made, two or three of the beavers held it down, while others piled stones on it and plastered it with mud. Soon they had a perfectly watertight dam, which was stronger than anything that man could make. This, of course, was not done in a day, but took a long, long time. Still, now it was all to the beaver's satisfaction, and Otto was happy once more.

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"Yota," said Eric, when the goose had finished the story of the beaver, "I know that you spend the greater part of the year in Canada, but where do you go for the coldest weeks of the winter? You must meet many animals of whom we know nothing."

"Many of the wild geese," said Yota, "spend their winters in South Carolina, but some of us go as far south as Florida, and then we do meet a few tropical animals that would be complete strangers to you. The greatest villain of them all is the alligator. Tomorrow I shall tell you the story of how Mrs. Cottontail and the two little Cottontails escaped the hungry jaws of Mr. Alligator."

CHAPTER XV

The Cottontails and the Alligator.

MRS. COTTONTAIL and her two sons were out for a walk. It was a bright sunshiny day, and they turned their steps in the direction of the river. Now the Cottontails very seldom wandered this far from their home in the willow thicket, and it was not long before they were in unfamiliar territory.

The two young rabbits, Spotter and Bobtail, thought it was a great lark, and they often ventured far ahead of their mother. Spotter, being the bolder of the two, sometimes even disappeared entirely for moments at a time.

"Spotter," said Mrs. Cottontail to her son when he returned from one of these excursions, "you must be very careful. There are many dangers along this river, which you know nothing about. The place for young rabbits is close by their mother's side." Bobtail looked solemnly at his mother, but not so, Spotter.

"Poof!" he said, striking his back legs sharply on the ground to show how strong he was, "I'm not afraid," and with that he darted far ahead and was soon out of sight.

After a few moments Mrs. Cottontail became anxious and she and Bobtail started out briskly in the direction in which the other rabbit had disappeared.

"Bobtail," said his mother as they hurried along, "I hope that you, at least, will always take your mother's

advice. Some harm is sure to come to young rabbits who are disobedient."

Now Bobtail was not as brave as his brother, but like all timid folk he greatly admired bravery in another, whether it was foolhardy or not, and with all his heart he wished that he had the courage to follow his brother.

"I have heard," went on Mrs. Cottontail, "that there are alligators in this river, but as long as we stay well away from the banks there is no danger, for an alligator seldom wanders far from the water's edge. I have told Spotter so many times of the dangers of the river, that I am sure he would not be so foolish as to venture——

"Horrors!" she cried suddenly, "what is that?" And well might she exclaim, for there on the river bank, his huge scaly tail swishing back and forth, lay a great big alligator. Not ten feet from him sat the venturesome Spotter, staring at the huge warty creature in fascinated wonder!

Mrs. Cottontail was so terror-stricken that she could not move. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" wailed the alligator. "my poor back is so hot with this terrible sun!" and the tears splashed from his eyes in huge drops.

Now Spotter began to feel very sorry for the big creature. Surely he must be in great misery (you see Spotter had never heard of "crocodile tears," which are the same as alligator tears) and the foolish young rabbit hopped a few feet nearer.

"I've been sitting on this bank all day," went on the alligator, "and I think my back must be blistered. My foot is caught in a tree root, and I can't budge an inch. Boo-oo" he wept, "Won't some one please help me?" Now Spotter became so curious that he came

quite close. "If only I could get back to the river," went on the alligator, "I might find some relief from this awful heat."

Now all of this tale about the heat blistering his back was the greatest falsehood. For if there is anything that an alligator likes it is the hot sun, and the hotter it is the better he likes it. The alligator usually spends his days in the water, or basking in the blistering tropical sun close to the river bank. His legs are so short and so small that they really are not much use in propelling such a huge body. But he watches for his prey from the water, his whole enormous body being below the surface with the exception of his eyes and his nostrils. Many an unsuspecting creature

Now Spotter became so curious that he came quite close.

coming to the river to drink, is seized and drawn in to make a meal for the wily alligator.

Now Mr. Alligator this day had watched the young rabbit hopping through the grasses along the river bank, and his ugly old jaws watered at the thought of the juicy morsel this fat little rabbit would make, but never did Spotter come close enough for the alligator to reach him. And so the crafty fellow clumsily pulled himself out of the water and stretched out on the bank in full view of the exploring rabbit.

Spotter came closer and closer until he was well within reach of the monster's tail. You see the rabbit thought that if he stayed away from the alligator's jaws he was quite safe, for well he knew that such a slow-moving creature as the alligator could never catch one who was the swiftest runner in the woods.

But as is true with so many of nature's creatures, where the body is slowest moving, the wits are the keenest, and Mr. Alligator now used one of his favorite weapons. He raised his huge scaly tail, and was just about to sweep the defenseless rabbit into his waiting jaws, when out of the thicket almost at his very nose hopped another rabbit even fatter than the other.

Now Mr. Alligator forgot all about his story of being entangled in a tree root, and he made a dive for the young Bobtail—for it was he. Bobtail did not move until the alligator was almost upon him, then he took a few steps into the bushes. The alligator followed him. Always the rabbit waited until the alligator came quite close, and then with a little jump he would be just out of reach. The exasperated alligator followed on and on. So intent was he upon the chase that he did not realize how far he had gone from the river. The sun shone hot, and well might he now

complain for there was no river near where he could cool his burning back.

Once Bobtail allowed the alligator to come so close that the monster's breath stirred the fur on his back. His jaws came together with a snap, but with one jump the rabbit was out of reach. Up on the top of a grassy knoll he paused.

"Good bye, Mr. Alligator," he called. "See if you can find your way to the river!" and turning, he hopped quickly back to the spot where he had left his panic-stricken mother and his foolish young brother.

Mrs. Cottontail drew a breath of relief when she saw her young son safe, and as they turned toward home Spotter kept very close of his mother's heels. But Bobtail led the way, only turning every now and then to blink solemnly at the now much subdued Spotter.

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No sooner had Yota finished than Nat was ready with something better.

"My story will be about bears," he said importantly, "and I'll begin it first thing tomorrow evening."

CHAPTER XVI

Growler, the Big Bear.

MR. GROWLER, the Brown Bear, opened his eyes sleepily. There was something in the air this morning that told him spring had come. All winter long he had lain in his retreat, sleeping for the most of the time, coming out perhaps once or twice during a thaw to see if it were time to emerge fom his long winter's nap.

He pushed out his slender nose and sniffed once or twice, then drew a lean, lanky body after. He paused to look about him. It had been many weeks since he had had a meal, and the pangs of hunger were becoming rather painful.

In the tree above sat Gorgo the Raven. He, too, was looking for a meal. As Growler emerged from his retreat, Gorgo hopped to a lower limb.

"What makes you so lean, Growler?" he called. "You look as if you hadn't had a meal for many a day."

"You know very well I haven't," answered the bear, sniffing loudly at the root of the tree. "And I can't see that you look very fat yourself. Where are all those fine, meaty bones you are always boasting about?"

Now there is no creature living who is a greater glutton than the raven, and he spends nearly every moment of his time gorging himself from the bones of unfortunate animals who have fallen prey to others. But the departing winter had been a hard one, and

old Mr. Wolf had picked the bones so clean that Gorgo had not been able to satisfy himself to the usual extent.

Gorgo was not at all fond of Mr. Growler. Ever since the time Growler had come upon him one day gorging himself so disgracefully upon the carcass of a deer, and had given him the name of "Gorgo," he had held a grudge against the old fellow.

"Since you think I look so lean, Gorgo, suppose you come down and help me find something to eat," said Growler.

"You and I do not care for the same kind of food," answered the raven, watching the bear strip the bark from a tree and lap up a whole colony of ants, "so I'm afraid I should not be of much assistance to you. But there is one thing I do know, and that is that you are mighty fond of honey."

At the mention of the word "honey" Growler pricked up his ears. Ever since he had been a little cub, and his mother had shown him how to rob a bees' nest, he had been on the constant lookout for honey.

"Oh!" he said to Gorgo, "if you could only tell me where I could find a bees' nest, I should be so thankful and when I become strong again I will certainly repay you."

"Well," said the raven, with a cunning look, "I know where there is a nest not so far from here. But first I must ask a favour of you."

"Anything I can do, Gorgo," answered the bear eagerly, "you may be sure will be done most willingly."

"Tell me then, Growler, where does Black Wing live, and where does he go to feed? It is said that he is the best-fed raven in the forest, and no one knows his hunting ground."

Now the vision of that promised honey was very

sweet to the hungry bear, and so he said to Gorgo: "Certainly I will tell you where to find Black Wing. He has his nest in the old elm down by the beaver dam. I saw him only yesterday."

"Oh, thank you, Growler, thank you!" cried the raven, and was about to take wing.

"Wait!" called the bear. "What about that bees' nest?"

"Oh, yes," answered Gorgo. "You will find the hive in that old cedar tree over by the clover patch. You know where that is, Growler."

"Yes, indeed," said Growler, "I know it very well, but I never dreamed there was a bees' nest there."

Just then the two were startled by a sound from above. Hooty, the owl, awakened by voices, poked his head out of his nest and looked down upon the two.

"Good morning, Hooty!" called the raven. "Aren't you up rather soon? The sun is no where near setting yet. You'll be blinder than Mr. Bat if you don't be careful."

"I know," said Hooty in his queer quavering voice. "But I heard you two talking together, and I just wanted to set you right on one or two things. You, Gorgo, I am sure you must be mistaken about the honey in that cedar tree. I spent some time up there yesterday, and there was not a bit of honey in the tree; in fact it was a very dismal hole, and not a bee about the place."

"And you," he went on turning to Growler. "You couldn't have seen Black Wing recently, for I met him over a month ago on his way south. He told me there wasn't enough food in this wood to keep a woodpecker alive, and that he was going south. And so I'm sure you're both very much mistaken."

Hooty, the owl . . . . looked down upon the two.

Now Hooty was such a stupid, unsuspecting old fellow that he did not realize that Growler and Gorgo were really telling stories, each trying to fool the other. So when Growler ambled off into the wood without saying a word, and Gorgo began picking busily at a root, as if he had not heard, Hooty was very much surprised.

"Well," he said, as he watched them disappear in the forest, "they are a queer pair."

Now Eric had always been intensely interested in the doings of bears, and he had listened most attentively to the story. Nat, much pleased at his success, would have liked to go on with another story, but Mrs. Oldson was calling Eric, and so they had to break up for the evening.

"Never mind though," said Nat, as they walked home, "I'll tell you a story tomorrow that will beat anything that old goose knows."

CHAPTER XVII

Sniffer and the Grizzly.

MRS. GROWLER, the Brown Bear, and her two cubs, Sniffer and Boxer, were out for a walk. Mrs. Growler was teaching her two children some of the tricks that it is necessary a bear should know. The two fuzzy little fellows were very awkward and were so full of play and mischief that the mother had hard work to keep their attention.

"Now see if you can walk along that log with your eyes shut," she commanded.

Sniffer tried first, but he had only gone a few steps when he slipped on a snag and rolled off. Then Boxer mounted the log, and waddled along awkwardly until he had almost reached the end.

"Oh, Oh! he's peeking," cried Sniffer, and jumped against Boxer, pushing him off. This was then a sign for a quarrel, and the two little cubs fought and rolled around on the ground until Mrs. Growler interfered, and cuffed them both soundly on their funny little ears.

"You never will learn anything," she told them. "Here it is almost fall and you don't know half the tricks you should by this time. Now see how quickly you can shin up that tree. You first, Boxer."

Boxer scratched and tore at the bark, climbed a few feet, then slipped back to the ground. "No, no," said the mother bear, "put your arms about the tree thus," and going to the tree she encircled it with her strong arms, and drew herself gradually up to the branches.

"If you do not climb that tree you shall not have any

dinner," she commanded. At this awful threat the two bears set to work in earnest, and it was not long before each had accomplished the task, for which they received a large chunk of juicy honey, which Mother Bear had secured from a bee-tree the day before.

"Now," said Mrs. Bear, when they had finished, "we shall go hunting. There is an ant nest over in Bear Hollow and I want to see if you can find it." They started out walking single file, as bears always do, the two little ones quarreling all the while for second place.

"Now," said Mrs. Bear, stopping and smelling the air, "we are not far from the ants' nest. Tell me which way you would go from here."

Boxer and Sniffer began smelling the air in all directions. "Over in that cedar tree," said Boxer. "Under that flat stone," said Sniffer. "Wrong both of you," answered the mother. "They are right on the ground almost at your feet." And going over to a pile of leaves she brushed the covering aside, revealing a whole colony of ants and ants' eggs ready to be hatched. The little bears lost no time, you may be sure, in lapping up the dainty morsel.

"My, but you are a helpless pair," said Mrs. Growler. "You surely would starve to death if you had to forage for your own food. Come, now we will have a nap." And stretching herself out in a sheltered hollow she told the two cubs to curl themselves up beside her. "And don't wander away while I'm asleep," she said. "There's a big grizzly in the neighborhood and he would make short work of you."

Now it was early afternoon, and the two little bears were not sleepy at all. But Mother bear was soon breathing heavily. They were so full of play and

Then Boxer mounted the log.

frolic, that they could not stay quiet, so before long they slipped quietly off, and wandered down over the hill. They had great fun tumbling each other about and wallowing in a mud pond which they found there. They had soon forgotten their mother's warning about the grizzly, and were busily fishing in the pond for

crabs, when a crackling in the bush behind made the hair on their backs stand straight up.

"The Grizzly!" cried Boxer, starting off up the hill in the direction of the spot in which they had left the mother. Sniffer followed close, but although they ran and ran, no trace could they find of the old bear. They called and they whimpered, but there was no answer.

"Oh! Oh!" cried Sniffer. "I wish we had never gone to the pond. I wish we had minded our mother, and stayed close by her side."

Boxer then pretended to be very brave. "I'm a great big bear," but his boast died off in a whimper when he heard the crackling sound coming closer. The two little bears shrank back in the bushes, and waited in fear for the sight of the Grizzly as he should appear over the hill. They closed their eyes tight, and when the great footsteps came quite close, they gasped and their eyes flew open.

"Oh!" gasped Boxer.

"Oh!" echoed Sniffer in a tone of relief. There in the pathway stood, not the terrible Grizzly, but their own mother. Having missed them almost at once from her side, she had gone in search of them, and finding them playing near the pond had hidden in the bushes. She thought a little fright would be good for such disobedient children.

That night the two little cubs lay down close beside the mother. There was no danger of their wandering away again for many a day.

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"I think that bears are such fascinating creatures," said Eric, when at last Nat had finished the story of Sniffer and Boxer.

"Then," said Yota, who always tried to tell a story just as good, and if possible, better than Nat's, "perhaps you would like a story about a coon. The coons are really relatives of the bears you know. If you have ever thought about it you must have noticed that the coons are quite bearlike in their habits. They have their flat-footed way of walking, also their way of sitting up on their hind feet and using their front paws like hands. I will tell you tomorrow about one coon I knew whose name was Ringtail."

CHAPTER XVIII

Mr. Racoon Goes Frog Hunting.

IT was just growing dusk when Mr. Racoon wandered along the bank of the stream to procure his daily meal. What a queer little creature he was with his pointed black nose and round sharp eyes! His coat was of a dull brownish grey, becoming lighter on the back. Below each eye was a black patch. A whitish mark surrounding the whole face gave him a very impish look. You never could have mistaken Mr. Coon with his black masked face and bushy tail. His front paws were almost like the hands of a monkey, and it was with these very capable hands that he procured most of his food. His beautiful tail was long and fluffy and marked with five or six jet black rings.

This evening Mr. Coon whose name was Ringtail, prowled along the stream close to the water's edge. Very stealthily he lowered one of his front paws into the water. It was not long before he drew up a wiggling, squirming, morsel which proved to be a small green frog. Now one would expect to see him pop the unlucky frog into his mouth at once, but no—Mr. Coon is one of the cleanest creatures known, and he carefully washed the sand and mud from the frog before he ate it.

The coon cannot dive for his food like the otter or mink, and will only swim when absolutely necessary, neither can he run very fast, and depends more upon the sharpness of his wits than anything else to keep out of danger. But just the same Mr. Coon is quite

able to protect himself. At the first alarm he will make for a tree, and is such a desperate fighter that it is almost impossible to get at him. Hunters sometimes resort to fire to drive him out of his retreat, but even that often fails, for he had been known to stay inside the tree cavity until he dies with suffocation rather than be taken alive. But you must not think that Mr. Coon is a desperate character, no indeed; on the contrary he is quite a family man, and it is usually in defense of his family that he does his fighting.

The coons are a most affectionate family. The father and mother make a nest in an old tree hollow, and here in the spring of the year the young coons are born. There are usually four little ones, and you would have to go a long way before you would find anything as adorable as a young coon. The father does not desert his family when the young arrive as so many animals do, but stays at home and helps look after them. In May or June they begin to sit outside in the warm sunshine, but at the very first sign of danger they all scamper inside. Soon they accompany their mother to the marsh on her nightly excursions for food, and are taught the art of frog hunting. In August, Mother Coon takes them to the fields where the green corn grows, and they revel in a feast that is to them what the honey is to the bears. The young coons will stay in the nest as long as the old coons will allow them, which is almost a year. If ever you are fortunate enough to see a baby coon you will agree with the saying that there is nothing else quite "as cute as a coon."

But to return to Ringtail hunting for his supper. He had not been long in the marsh when Jack Rabbit came along. Ringtail did not say anything to Jack

Rabbit at once, but went on drawing out frogs and cray-fish, and more frogs and cray-fish, until the rabbit wondered where he could put them all.

"You must be very hungry tonight, Mr. Coon," said Jack Rabbit as politely as he could.

Hungry! huh! I guess you would be, too, if you only had one meal a day," grunted the coon.

"Oh," said the rabbit, "I didn't know that you only eat once a day. Then of course you are hungry."

Ringtail seemed to feel a little mollified at this, and showed him the fat frog he was taking home to his babies. Now to the rabbit, who spends nearly every moment of his time eating, it seemed the height of foolishness to eat only one meal a day. He said something of this to the busy coon.

"I have something else to do," answered Ringtail. "besides eating, and any way one good meal a day is enough for any one."

"Of course," said Jack Rabbit, "if you feel quite satisfied with one meal that is all very well."

"Oh, yes," answered the coon. "I am quite satisfied."

"I was just going to say," went on Jack Rabbit, "that I know a field where the sweet corn is ripe, but of course you have had your meal, and you would not be interested."

"Sweet corn!" exclaimed Mr. Coon, suddenly dropping the cray-fish he had been washing. "Did you say sweet corn?"

"Yes," answered Jack Rabbit, moving away slowly, "I'm going right past that field now."

"Wait," said Ringtail, hurrying after him. "You know the fishing was really not very good tonight, and although I really only eat one meal a day I should be glad to know where that corn field is located."

Ringtail did not say anything to Jack Rabbit at once.

"Oh, I see," answered the rabbit politely, though he could not help remembering the way the coon had been drawing out cray fish when he came upon him, and he had his doubts as to the fishing being poor. "You just want to have it ready for your next meal," he suggested.

"That's it," answered the coon eagerly, and he moved quickly through the wood after the rabbit. In a moment they had come to the corn patch.

But when Ringtail saw that corn field, with its hanging ears of luscious green corn, he forgot all about his former declaration, and nosing his way between the overhanging stalks, he soon had his sharp little teeth deep in the sweet milky kernels. He had finished the first row and had begun upon the second when Jack Rabbit remarked, "Well, Ringtail, this is one day when you were not satisfied with a single meal."

Ringtail said nothing. He couldn't. He simply moved a delicious big ball of succotash from one cheek to another, and rolled his eyes.

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"I never knew," said Eric, "that the coons and the bears were related. And Jack Rabbit, is he also a relative of Mr. Coon?"

"Oh, no," answered Yota, "he comes from a different family entirely. The rabbits and the squirrels, however, are distant cousins. They both belong to the family of 'gnawing animals.' Perhaps you would like to hear the story of Piney Squirrel next. I'll tell you that some other evening. You must be running home now."

CHAPTER XIX

Piney Squirrel.

"DEAR ME! If it isn't raining," said Piney impatiently, as he came to the door of his den. Piney was a little red squirrel who lived in a hollow tree near the swamp. With great care he had lined the hollow with grass and bits of down until he really had a very cozy retreat, and even had it not been raining, one might wonder why Piney was not content to stay in such comfortable quarters.

But Piney was a restless little fellow, and to have to remain in one place more than five minutes at a time was really quite a hardship to him.

"To think that I spent two hours yesterday slicking up my coat," said Piney, and he looked regretfully at his shining fur and beautiful bushy tail. "It always seems to rain when I do that," he went on. "I certainly don't care to go out in that rain, but I must be hunting up my breakfast."

Now Piney, like all other squirrels, hated to get wet. But worse even than getting wet, was the prospect of sitting quietly in his den all day with not a person to speak to. So persuading himself that it was very necessary that he go out, Piney left his den and started on his quest. Very gingerly he went at first, picking his way through the wet grasses, running along a log or fencerail wherever possible. Every moment or so he stopped to listen. Occasionally the sound of a falling nut drew him from the path, and he frisked through the wet leaves to investigate.

"Guess I'll see if Reddy's at home," he said as he came in sight of the huge elm in which his cousin lived. When he reached the tree, instead of disappearing into the hollow as might be expected, Piney ran up the trunk of the tree until he came to the place where Reddy had his house. Piney did not stand on ceremony, but entered his cousin's house without knocking.

"Hello, Reddy!" he called—but received no answer.

"Not at home," he decided. "I'm sure Reddy wouldn't mind if I took a nut." He helped himself to a fine large one, and was soon on his way.

The trees now became more scattered and the ground swampy. A small stream in which the fish jumped and splashed, wended its way through the marsh.

"The fish are very playful this morning," said Piney as he followed the stream in its course. "They must like this rainy weather. Ugh! I can't say the same myself." And he shook his wet fur until the glistening drops flew.

"Hello, Piney!" called a voice that seemed to come from the very ground under his feet. "Fine day this!" And Danny Muskrat appeared from beneath an overhanging bank.

"Fine day!" echoed Piney. "I don't see anything fine about this day. Just look at my tail!" And truly you would not have recognized it as the fine bushy plume with which he had started out. But Danny only laughed, and splashing vigorously, started up stream after one of the little muskrats in a game of chase. Piney stood watching them a moment.

"They really seem to be enjoying themselves," he said. "How strange it would seem to be splashing around in water. I wonder if Paddy Beaver is out

this morning," he remarked as he started off up the river toward the beaver dam.

When he arrived there he found not only Paddy, but his whole family also. Paddy was hustling about in a most energetic manner. The little Beavers were cutting twigs and Mother Beaver helped drag them into place. They kept up a merry chattering all the while,

"Hello, Piney," called a voice.

and seemed in unusually good spirits. Meanwhile, Piney sat bunched up on the bank watching them. The rain had soaked his beautiful silky coat, and his bedraggled tail drooped. "Great weather, Piney," called

Paddy Beaver to the little squirrel. "If this rain keeps up a day or two longer we'll soon have our dam finished. The current carries our sticks along in fine style." And Paddy, coming to the shore shook himself vigorously. Every hair in his thick coat stood up straight.

"Don't you hate to get wet?" asked Piney.

"Oh, no," answered Paddy, "I love it. You see my coat is almost waterproof." And then Piney saw that it was as the Beaver said, the fur underneath was almost dry.

"I think I'll be going," said Piney. He did not like to admit to the Beaver how very wet and cold he felt. The thought of his cozy, warmly lined nest at home was very attractive to him, and he hurried through the wood as fast as he could go. So great was his haste that he bumped against some creature crouched in the long grass.

"You'd better look out where you're going," said a voice gruffly.

"My goodness!" gasped Piney. "Is that you Jack Rabbit? Whatever are you doing out here in the rain? Why don't you get under cover?"

"I'm not out in the rain," answered the rabbit.

"Not out in the rain!" exclaimed Piney. You must be crazy, Jack Rabbit. It is pouring, and has been for hours."

"Oh, I know that it's raining well enough, but why should I care when I'm under such splendid cover? Don't you see those two huge shingles on my back?" Piney came up close, but could see nothing.

"My ears, stupid!" said the rabbit. "Don't you know that they are waterproof, and that all I have to do is to lay them over my back when it rains?"

And then Piney saw that Jack Rabbit who had unusually long thick ears, had them laid flat over his back, and that the rain dripped off the ends of them leaving his back fairly dry.

"Well, I never!" said the astonished Piney.

"You look rather wet yourself, Piney," said the Rabbit. "You'd better get under cover, or you'll have rheumatism."

"Guess I will," said Piney, and he started off briskly never stopping once till he reached his den. As he cuddled down in the warm little nest he remarked to himself: "Every one to his own taste I suppose. But after this I'll choose a sunshiny day for my walks."

* * * *

"And what about the flying squirrels?" asked Eric. "Do they also belong to this family?"

"Yes," answered Yota, "they are of the same branch, only they are not nearly so numerous as the common squirrels like Reddy and Piney. Some time soon I'll tell you about the flying squirrels found in Canada."

CHAPTER XX

The Flying Squirrel.

IT was the lonesome hour of the day—the hour when the wild creatures seek the home nest. Not a sound could be heard, save the occasional twitter of a mother bird as she settled herself in the nest among her brood, or the distant hoot of an owl as he bestirred himself after his day of dozing and started on his nightly quest for food. Suddenly there was a rustle in the leaves overhead, and softly there floated to the earth some creature light as down.

Reddy Squirrel, who was out much later than usual this evening, was hurrying that he might reach his home before nightfall. For most animals unless it be the real night-faring ones, like to be safe in their cozy nests at sunset.

Now Reddy had thought that he was familiar with every wild thing in the woods, but here was something quite new. By its sailing, soaring flight from the tree, Reddy had expected to see some kind of a bird. Imagine his surprise then, on finding that it was a squirrel very much like himself. Now Reddy when cornered would often take a bold leap from a tree, and would reach the ground unhurt from a distance of twenty or thirty feet, but this squirrel had appeared to spread a sort of soft wing as he descended.

"Good evening," said Reddy, "are you not some relative of mine?" Now the small stranger was a shy little creature, and he jumped about the lower branches of the tree eyeing Reddy doubtfully. At last, however,

There were dozens of the little flying creatures.

he came close enough so that Reddy could see what a wonderfully beautiful little creature he was. His fur was soft and velvety and of a fawny brown color, and the under side of his body was white. In size he was a little smaller than an ordinary squirrel.

But the most wonderful part of it was that between the legs on each side was a kind of membrane, connecting the front legs with the back, and forming a wing which enabled the little creature to leap from a great height. The bushy tail, which was broader and flatter than Reddy's, also aided in the descent.

Now Reddy had heard stories about flying squirrels, but he never really thought that they existed. One of

the older squirrels had once told him that they were to be found in South America and Africa where all sorts of freakish animals lived, and so he was much surprised when this little squirrel told him that he stayed in this wood the year round, though most of his relatives lived in the tropics. He and his family, he said, were the only species of flying squirrel to be found in North America.

"But," said Reddy, "why have I never seen you before? I have spent many days in this wood, and never until this evening have I met any of your family."

"That's easily explained," answered the flying squirrel. "We come out chiefly after sunset, and thus many animals do not know that we even exist."

"It must be lovely to be able to fly," said Reddy, "and you do it so easily, too."

"We don't really fly," answered the little squirrel, "although many think so. What we do is to climb to a great height, and sail down on our wings as with a parachute. We can not fly upward you see."

"And where is your nest?" asked Reddy.

"I am living in one of Downy Woodpecker's discarded ones. Downy always seems to be moving his quarters from one tree to another, and the hole that he makes just suits us. That's why we like this part of the country. There are so many woodpeckers here."

"Do you not go south in the winter?"

"No indeed," answered the squirrel, "we do not mind the cold at all. We are quite comfortable in the tree hollow, and as for the cold and snow—there's nothing we like better than to go out on a windy, stormy night and have a good game of chase."

Suddenly the little animal darted away and reappeared in the branches of a neighbouring tree. Soon

he was joined by another of his kind and still another, until in a few moments there were dozens of the little flying creatures, sailing, coasting, crossing and recrossing one another, as gay as a lot of boys in a game of tag.

For the first time in his life Reddy was envious. Here was a squirrel who could get about quicker than he could. He watched the agile little creatures for a few minutes, and then suddenly realizing that the night was almost upon them, he scurried away through the semi-darkness to his cozy nest in the old elm.

* * * *

"Nat," said Eric, "it's about time for you to tell a story. Don't you know any tales about woodchucks? Surely an old experienced dog like you would have dug many a woodchuck out of his hole."

"It's not as easy as you might think," answered Nat. "to dig a woodchuck out. I'm not saying that I've never done it myself, but I'll tell you tomorrow of the experience Mr. Fox had when he tried to dig Chuckie out of his retreat."

CHAPTER XXI

Mr. Fox Meets Mr. Woodchuck.

IF there is anything in the world old Mr. Fox hates, it is to be made a dupe of. He prides himself on his cunning, and usually he is able to outwit all other creatures of the woods. That is why he could not understand how he could have lost that goose. So when he returned to the wood he was in a pretty bad temper, I can tell you, and he began looking around for something to vent his wrath upon.

Now, over on the far side of the wood lived Marmot Woodchuck. The house he had made for himself was indeed a work of art. He had hollowed it out to an unusual depth, and he had made so many different exits to it that it would have been hard indeed to have found the little fellow once he was safe within. Here he had brought Mrs. Woodchuck the year before, and here in the spring, four little Chucks had been born. They had all left the nest by this time to make homes of their own. Even Mrs. Woodchuck had sallied forth one day never to return. Mr. Woodchuck did not grieve too much over their departure. He was too busy getting in his winter supply of food.

The way in which Mr. Woodchuck stores up his food is very queer indeed. He does not carry in great hordes of nuts and grain as does Reddy Squirrel, and many other wild creatures. If you went into his den you would not find one thing that was good to eat. Chuckie begins in the summer to lay up food inside his own little body. He eats and eats, and gets so fat

by fall that it is all he can do to move around. And the fatter he grows, the lazier he becomes, until November when he crawls into his hole, curls himself up into a little round ball, and goes to sleep. Throughout the winter months he stays in this condition—hibernating as it is called. The fat that he has accumulated during the spring and summer is gradually absorbed without Chuckie knowing a thing about it. Mother Nature looks after that. In the spring the little creature that crawls out of the hole is very different looking from the one who went in, in the fall. He has grown very thin, and having lost his great load of fat has become quite lively. Then he starts scurrying about hoarding up his next year's supply. So you see Chuckie is a little glutton and really lives to eat.

Now, about the time that old Mr. Fox was prowling around the wood, Woodchuck was beginning to get pretty fat, and, as I said, very lazy. This particular day he was lying just outside his hole (you know a woodchuck never goes more than a few jumps from his own door), lazily enjoying the last rays of the setting sun. He was making that peculiar noise, half singing, half whistling, which a woodchuck always does, when contented. He knew that Mr. Fox lived somewhere in the wood, but he had never bothered his head much about him. As a rule, neither a fox nor any other wild creature will attack a woodchuck, for Chuckie has such a thick hide, that it is almost impossibly to penetrate it even if one did catch him. And then, too, he stays so close to his hole that at the least sign of danger, he will scurry into safety.

Usually, Mr. Fox pays no attention whatever to Chuckie. But this particular evening, as you know, he had been so upset over losing the goose, that he

hardly knew what he was doing. He felt just in the mood for fighting somebody, and the first creature he thought of was Woodchuck. So sneaking quickly through the brush, he came upon a little hill, from which he could view the woodchuck's den. There was Chuckie, sure enough, lying contentedly outside his hole, whistling his little song.

The sight of the fat woodchuck lying there so contentedly made the fox madder than ever. But even then he did not forget his cunning. Curling himself up in a round ball, and twisting his tail about his head, he lay down on the very top of the hill. Now, this is a trick of Mr. Fox's—lying so very still, he looked exactly like a huge round stone, and this is just what he intended. Meantime, through his tail he kept a sharp eye on the woodchuck. Mr. Woodchuck, looking about for any danger, saw nothing to alarm him, and allowed himself to doze.

When Mr. Fox saw that Woodchuck was asleep, he quietly uncurled himself, and creeping nearer and nearer the hole, braced himself ready to spring. But just then one of his claws loosened a stone, and it came rattling down the hill. Chuckie gave one startled look around, and made a dash for his hole. How the dirt did fly! A great cloud of it was thrown into Mr. Fox's face, and when it had cleared away, all he could see were the sharp little eyes and pointed nose of Chuckie glaring angrily out at him. Ordinarily, Mr. Fox would have given up when he saw the woodchuck safe in his hole, and have gone his way. But things had not gone well with him this day, and giving one or two angry yelps, he began digging at the entrance.

Now, Woodchuck could hardly believe his eyes. Did Mr. Fox think he could dig him out? Resorting to

. . . . Creeping nearer and nearer the hole.

his last means of defense, Chuckie himself began to dig. The rapidity with which he shovelled in that dirt was marvellous. In less than one moment he had closed the hole in upon himself. So quickly did he work that before the fox had recovered from his astonishment, Woodchuck was safe in the farthest recesses of his retreat.

If Mr. Fox was angry before, I don't know what you would say about him now. The dirt fairly flew around the place where that hole had been! The stones rattled about him, and bits of mud stuck to his coat. Frantically he worked until he was bathed in sweat. His beautiful red coat that had been so glossy in the morning, hung in loose folds. His eyes became dull, and his tongue lolled out. Froth clung to his gaping jaws, and he was a very sorry-looking spectacle, indeed. Finally, exhausted, he dragged himself over the hill and disappeared.

And Mr. Woodchuck—safe in the depths of his retreat, chuckled to himself, as he heard the fox retreating.

"Serves him right," he remarked. "Nothing is worth getting so angry about."

* * * *

"Of course," said Eric, "Chuckie was very foolish to go to sleep outside his den. I always thought that a woodchuck was a most cautious creature."

"So he is," answered Nat, "but Chuckie was a very young woodchuck, and it was really the first time he had been left to look after himself. Most woodchucks stay very close to their dens. Of course there are occasions when they may wander away. I will tell you tomorrow of the adventure of Chipper Woodchuck."

CHAPTER XXII

The Adventure of Chipper.

CHIPPER, the woodchuck, came to the door of his house and looked about him. There was a very persistent gnawing in the pit of his stomach which only one thing would satisfy, and that was a good hearty meal. As he stood there undecided which way to turn, a breath of sweet-scented clover came to him from the direction of Blackberry Grove. At once he started out in search of the juicy blossoms he knew could not be far away.

Now a woodchuck usually stays pretty close to his hole, so that if any danger is at hand he can scurry into it at once. Chipper, like all of his family, was not much of a traveller, and his progress was necessarily slow. He trotted along the roadside on his short little legs, his heavy body barely missing the ground. As he went he nipped a tender root here and there, or a leaf of peppermint. He kept close to the cover of the bramble bushes, and almost before he knew it he came upon Tufty, the rabbit, asleep beneath a bunch of grass.

"Well, of all the careless fellows," said Chipper, "these Cotton Tails are the worst! Why, anyone could come along and pick that rabbit up before he was awake." And Chipper shook his head as he stood surveying the sleepy rabbit.

Just then a fly bit Tufty on the nose, and he woke. In an instant his two back legs shot out and struck Chipper square on the chest, so that he went tumbling

over and over down the steep bank. Chipper, who was used to rolling around in the dirt, picked himself up unhurt, but nevertheless very angry.

Tufty by this time was thoroughly awake, and when he saw who it was he had tumbled so unceremoniously down the bank he was most apologetic.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I thought it was Stripes the Chipmunk, who is always prying around here."

"That's a nice way to treat a body," said Chipper angrily, shaking the dirt from his stiff, bristly coat.

"I'm sorry," repeated Tufty, "but how could I know it was you? And how do you happen to be this far away from your hole anyway? I'd like to know what you'd do if the old hound came along now."

Chipper looked about him a little uneasily at this. "Do you know how much farther that clover patch is?" he asked anxiously. "I've an awful hunger, and from the whiff of clover I thought the patch could not be far away."

"It's a good way from here, Chipper. I'm afraid you'll be awfully hungry before you reach there at the rate you're going."

While the two were talking, a big spider in the bushes behind was busily spinning a web. She had just finished a fine, long line when a breath of air wafted the light thing over and fastened the end of it in Tufty's thick fur. Mrs. Spider went on spinning her web and sewing her eggs securely to the underside of a leaf. But, alas! she had weighed the leaf too heavily, and in a moment it broke from the twig and fluttering down, caught by the web to Tufty's fluffy tail.

Tufty, giving one leap in the air, dashed off the dry leaf crackling loudly as it bobbed up and down

behind. The terrified woodchuck followed close. On and on they went, never looking once behind; the rabbit feeling the unknown thing still attached to his tail, and the woodchuck running because the rabbit did. Poor Chipper, with his short legs, had all he could do to keep up with the rabbit, and the only rea-

"Why is that leaf fastened to your tail, Tufty?"

son that he was not left behind was that Tufty cut so many unnecessary circles, while the woodchuck ran in a straight line. As they passed through Mulberry Swamp in their fright they almost knocked over Thumper, who was resting in the pennyroyal patch.

"What's the matter?" called Thumper. But, getting no answer and thinking there must be something terrible in pursuit, he, too, joined in the chase.

Poor Chipper thought his last days had surely come, and he sincerely wished himself back in his hole, even with an empty stomach. But he kept on, barely keeping the two rabbits in sight. Even the rabbits were becoming weary. They were crossing under a rail fence when Stripes, the chipmunk, hearing the disturbance, ran out of his den.

"Goodness," he chattered, as he skipped along on the rail. "Who's after you, and why the leaf fastened to your tail, Tufty?"

"Leaf?" gasped Tufty, slowing up. "Leaf? Surely you don't mean to tell me it's only a leaf!"

"An old, dried-up leaf, Tufty, attached by a spider web," said the mischievous Stripes, fairly dancing along the fence, and shrieking aloud in glee.

"Is that what you three old fellows were running from?" he asked. "Well, you are a foolish lot." And Stripes, whisking along the fence, disappeared in his hole, still chattering derisively.

Tufty and Thumper looked at each other rather foolishly. They were so out of breath, and hot and tired, and with it all so disgusted that they turned about and started home at once, hardly saying a word to one another as they went.

If the rabbits were tired, who were made for running, what of Chipper, who seldom ventured out of sight of home? Poor Chipper could not drag himself another step. In a fence corner he lay with his eyes half closed, panting heavily. Still without food, he was sure he would never have the strength to reach home. Suddenly he sat up, nose in air—could it be possible?

In a moment he was over the fence deep in the patch of sweet-scented clover!

* * * *

"I'm certainly glad that Chipper found clover at last," said Eric, "but I am surprised that he would ever venture that far from his hole."

"Woodchucks are indeed very fond of their homes," answered Nat. "They will fight for them, too. Did you ever hear how Jimmy Skunk and Chipper quarreled about a hole in the river bank?"

"No," said Eric, "do tell us the story." And the next day he told them about Chipper Woodchuck and Jimmie Skunk.

CHAPTER XXIII

Chipper's Quarrel With Jimmie Skunk.

WOODCHUCK TOWN was in a commotion. Chipper Woodchuck and Jimmie Skunk had started a dispute which threatened to end in a very serious quarrel. The trouble all started about a den in the river bank. Chipper said he had dug the hole, and had gone out to get some leaves, and when he returned he had found the skunk comfortably settled within.

Jimmie Skunk declared that was not the hole Chipper had dug at all, and he refused to budge an inch.

"I will allow you to share it with me though, Chipper," offered Jimmie, but Woodchuck did not relish the idea at all.

"I simply could not live with Jimmie Skunk," he said to Thumper Rabbit, who had appeared on the scene. "He has a peculiar odor about him which makes me quite faint. No matter how much clover I eat, I cannot overcome that sick feeling."

At this Jimmie Skunk flirted his bushy tail scornfully. "Do as you please Chipper," he said and crawled into the den.

"I'll tell you, Chipper," said Thumper. "We'll ask the opinion of some of the wood people hereabout. There's Red-Headed Woodpecker, he's a good scout. Let him go out and see what the others think about it. And so Red Head was sent out to visit the animals.

First he went to the Frog and presented the matter

When he returned, he found the skunk comfortably settled.

to him. But Mr. Frog was not very attentive. Every few minutes he would dive down to the bottom of the river. After the fifth interruption he failed to reappear, and Woodpecker was forced to go on. Next he called on Mr. Owl. Now Red Head and Hooty Owl were not very good friends, so Red Head merely tapped on the tree and waited for Hooty to appear.

Old Hooter put his head out and blinked sleepily. The Woodpecker began his story about the Woodchuck and the Skunk, but long before he had finished Hooty was back in his nest with eyes tight shut.

"You're the stupidest creature I ever saw," said Red Head, and he flew up so close, that had it not been broad day light and he so blind, the owl would certainly have had a woodpecker supper that day.

Over on the river bank Red Head now spied the Beaver family. Paddy Beaver greeted him and listened attentively for a moment. Then, "just a minute!" he explained, and darted off to help Mrs. Paddy drag a log into place into the dam they were building. When he came back he said, "I don't see how any one can quarrel over a little hole in a hill. Why just look what I do every year," and he pointed to the wonderful dam he was building. Just then there was a splash and Paddy rushed away to direct a falling tree.

Red Head now began to feel rather discouraged. Everybody seemed too busy or too sleepy to care about the troubles of Mr. Woodchuck. He made his way slowly back to the river bank, wondering what he should say to the two waiting there.

But he might have spared himself all his worry. As he approached the river there sat Jimmie Skunk and Woodchuck looking very disconsolate to be sure, but no longer glaring angrily at one another. All of their attention was taken by a fallen tree which had floated down the river and so rammed the bank that the den had been entirely destroyed.

"Paddy Beaver's responsible for that I guess," said the Woodpecker, and he flew up into a tree and watched

the Skunk and the Woodchuck each digging a very nice hole for himself.

* * * *

"Chipper Woodchuck's and Jimmie Skunk's dispute reminds me," remarked Yota, "of the quarrel of Mr. and Mrs. Downy Woodpecker over a nest which they both claimed. I will tell you about it tomorrow."

CHAPTER XXIV

Mr. and Mrs. Downy Woodpecker.

"RAT-TAT-TAT!" sounded Mrs. Downy Woodpecker as he drilled industriously into the side of the old oak. "Rat-tat-tat!" and the chips flew in all directions, one hitting Mrs. Downy squarely on the head as she clung to the limb a few feet below.

"Goodness gracious, Downy," she called, "aren't you ever going to stop boring? You must have that hole deep enough by this time. One would think you were making swallow's nests by the distance you are boring into that tree." Now there's one thing you never could accuse Downy Woodpecker of, and that is of being henpecked. So he went on with his tapping, paying no attention whatever to his restless wife on the limb below. Mrs. Downy hopped about for a few moments picking out a nice fat grub here and there, and finally, throwing a disgusted glance at her unheeding spouse, flew off in the direction of the river. Accusing Downy of boring as deep as a swallow had reminded her of something. She would go to the river bank and see how the colony of swallows who had recently arrived there were getting on with their building.

The river bank which Mrs. Woodpecker visited, must have been a favourite nesting place for the bank swallows. It was so filled with holes they had bored that it looked as if a small cannon had been turned against it as a target. In and out of these holes flew the

To Mrs. Downy this eternal flight seemed very foolish.

swallows. They were very plain-looking birds, with brownish gray plumage, white below, and a grey band across the chest. But they were wonderfully formed, their long blade-like wings and small delicate feet giving them a grace which few birds possess.

This morning they were very industrious, flying back and forth from the near-by wood to the sand bank. Into the holes they darted, never pausing at the entrance as so many birds do before entering, for the swallow is essentially a bird of the air. Seldom do

their feet touch the ground, and they do very little perching except at night.

Now to Mrs. Downy this eternal flight seemed very foolish. Didn't she spend most of her time glued fast to the side of a tree, and did she not find there ample food for her wants? So why be always on the wing? Had she watched the swallow on his wonderful flights, she would have seen that it was on this very flight he secured his food. With mouth widely gaping, travels the swallow, and in it dozens of little gauzy-winged insects are caught. Sticky saliva on the bird's tongue glues the little victims there, and in this way the swallow procures his food. Now it must take many, many tiny insects to make a meal for these energetic birds, and that is why they are always on the wing—always in quest of food to supply their great energy.

Another thing about the swallows that Mrs. Downy could not understand was why they should take the trouble to bore so far into the river bank. Hopping up close, she peeked into one of the holes. As far back as she could see was a nest. It was a rather rough-looking affair, made of small sticks and the ends of twigs, but it was lined with fine hay and feathers, and placed far enough back to be secure from the worst storm. Finally Mrs. Downy grew weary of watching the swallows, and returned to the wood, thinking how nice it would be a to have a snooze in the new retreat. Not a sign did she see of Downy, and, going up to the hole which she had left him excavating, she peered in. There, seated comfortably within, was Downy, and no coaxing on the part of Mrs. Downy could bring him out, nor would he allow his wife to come in, this, I am sorry to say, being the nature of woodpeckers.

Now Mrs. Woodpecker was very much disappointed, for she had quite looked forward to occupying the new abode. Now she looked about for some means of drawing her obstinate spouse from the retreat. Finally, high over the wood a flock of geese appeared.

"Oh, Downy," she called, "come and look. Here's a flock of geese!" Now, if there was anything that Downy loved, it was to hear the honking of a flock of wild geese, and to see them streaking across the sky.

Scrambling out of the hollow, he jostled by his wife and sat perched on a limb above. The geese came from the north and seemed to be uncertain as to where to land. They hung over the wood for an instant, and then dropped off toward the lake, and finally disappeared. Then Downy turned to hop into his cozy nest. But, much to his chagrin, there sat Mrs. Downy comfortably ensconced within. It was now Downy's turn to beg and coax and threaten. But not an inch did Mrs. Downy stir. In fact she closed her eyes, and turning her back upon him, pretended to be asleep.

Now there is very little chivalry among the birds except at nesting time, and it is particularly true of the woodpeckers. Mrs. Woodpecker, after the brood is hatched, is expected to occupy the discarded nest of her lord and master, so now it seemed outrageous to Downy to have to stand and beg for admittance. At last, however, he turned away and crept into a last year's nest himself.

* * * *

When Yota had finished the story of the woodpeckers she was quiet for several moments. Then she said:

"It was just about this time of year when Downy went out to watch that flock of geese. It truly is a wonderful sight—a flock of geese streaking across the sky!" But in spite of Eric's demands for another story the old goose was silent. She seemed to be lost in thought, and would not promise any more.

CHAPTER XXV

The Call.

THE first few weeks of Yota's captivity had been very unhappy. She was the descendant of a very fine breed of mountain goose, and she felt it a disgrace to be forced to live among tame ones of common ancestry. From the Arctic to the tropics this fine old goose had travelled in her day, and the memory of that free wild life was always with her. Yet, after a time the desire for companionship had become too strong, and she no longer resented the advances of the tame geese.

But now the migrating season was at hand, and great flocks of wild birds flew daily toward the south. Yota began to grow restless. She felt within her the longing to be away.

Now at first, Yota had tried again and again to raise herself from the ground, but her close-cropped wings had been powerless, and she had gradually lost her desire for flight. Even the farmer forgot that she was different from the rest and neglected to clip her wings.

One morning just as Eric and Nat arrived at the barn yard, there appeared high overhead a flock of wild geese. Directly over the goose-pen they hung poised.

The Grey Goose on the ground below stood rigid, her neck stretched to its capacity, her eyes turned sidewise while she listened.

"Yap, yap!" barked Nat. "Good riddance!"

A little lower, dropped the honking flock. Now the Grey Goose showed signs of intense excitement. Memories of her old life crowded upon her, as she answered the honkings of her wild comrades above.

There was a moment of uncertainty, then from across the yard with wings upraised, came Yota. On she rushed, and as she reached the fence, up into the beautiful free air sailed the Grey Goose, leaving Eric and Nat staring stupidly after her.

Great was the joy in the air above. The very heavens seemed to ring with the welcoming call of the flock. As Yota joined them, the one who was the leader dropped back and the Grey Goose took her place at the head of the lines. Triumphantly, she turned the flock southward.

Speechless, Eric turned toward Nat, his eyes brimming with tears.

"Yap! Yap!" barked Nat, "Good riddance!"

Then, seeing how sorrowful his little master looked, he said comfortingly—"Never mind, she'll be back again next year."

So Eric threw his arms around Nat's neck and together they watched the flock until it became a mere speck against the southern sky.

Lois R. Peck